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THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS: A MEDIA NARRATIVE

By
Catherine Claire Hausman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2021

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ABSTRACT

Catherine Claire Hausman: Iran Hostage Crisis: A Media Narrative
(Under the direction of Vivian Ibrahim)

The Iran Hostage Crisis, from November 4, 1979 to January 20, 1981, was a defining moment in American foreign policy and US – Iranian relations. The news media – local and national newspapers and television – was saturated with coverage of the situation in Tehran and the subsequent US reaction. Americans watched the news over the 444 days, feeling sympathy and forging a collective national bond with the hostages; the international conflict was deeply personal for many Americans. The media played a central role in the establishment of the narrative of the hostage crisis, developing specific roles and personas of the United States and Iran as the crisis continued. In this thesis, I will explore the historical foundations of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran and its revolutionary spirit which overflowed, resulting in the embassy's seizure, as well as the tumultuous relationship between Iran and the US and the greater atmosphere of the 1970s. I analyze two events that book end the hostage crisis. I examine the creation of the media's narrative surrounding the hostage crisis and the historical role these outlets played in shaping the experience of American news consumers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
HISTORICAL PROBLEM	4
SECTION 1: BACKGROUND	
1.1 The 1953 Coup	8
1.2 From White Revolution to Iranian Revolution	17
1.3 US During the 1970s	24
1.4 Overview of Beginning of Hostage Crisis	29
SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDIES	
2.1 Methodology	36
2.2 Case Study: First Days of Hostage Crisis (November 4-5, 1979)	
2.2.1 Background: The Hostage Crisis	40
2.2.2 Media Analysis	42
2.3 Crisis as Status Quo (November 6, 1979 – January 18, 1981)	
2.3.1 Carter and Hostage Crisis	51
2.3.2 Election and Hostage Crisis	56
2.4 Case Study: Hostages Returned (January 19-20, 1981)	
2.4.1 Background: Negotiations	58
2.4.2 Media Analysis	60
CONCLUSION	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
Primary Sources	

Newspapers	69
CBS	70
Government Documents	70
Biographies and Speeches	71
Statistics	72
Secondary Sources	72

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Back Page of Chicago Tribune, November 6, 1979.

Figure 2: Front Page of Chicago Tribune, January 20, 1981.

Introduction:

The Iran Hostage Crisis, from November 4, 1979 to January 20, 1981, was a defining moment in American foreign policy and US – Iranian relations. The news media – local and national newspapers and television – was saturated with coverage of the situation in Tehran and the subsequent US reaction. Americans watched the news over the 444 days, feeling sympathy and forging a collective national bond with the hostages; the international conflict was deeply personal for many Americans. The media played a central role in the establishment of the narrative of the hostage crisis, developing specific roles and personas of the United States and Iran as the crisis continued. In this thesis, I explore the historical foundations of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran and its revolutionary spirit which overflowed, resulting in the embassy's seizure, as well as the tumultuous relationship between Iran and the US and the greater atmosphere of the 1970s. Using Ernest Bormann's fantasy-theme method of rhetorical criticism, I analyze two events that book end the hostage crisis. These case studies allow for an in-depth examination of the creation of the media's narrative surrounding the hostage crisis and the historical role these outlets played in shaping the experience of American news consumers.

Historical Problem and Sources used:

Until the hostage crisis began, relations between the United States and Iran were relatively unassuming. As with many other countries with which the United States had diplomatic relations in the 20th century, they traded weapons, raw materials and manufactured goods, and the United States invested in the Iranian economy¹. These relations deterred the notion that this bond would shatter and they would later become verbally and physically hostile

¹ Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, Chapter 2: 1953, (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), 26.

towards one another. Suddenly seizing their Embassy and its diplomatic workers, Iran became a capable aggressor in the eyes of Americans. Seeing the swift takeover of the embassy in Tehran and learning of the Iranian government's celebration of this deed, Americans' disillusionment to the threat of Iran was shattered. The Iran Hostage Crisis is perceived as a unique international incident. Historic analysis tends to view this crisis as one which was a culmination of Iranian anti-Americanism in the wake of its revolution and not a part of the larger relationship between the United States and Iran. These 444 days also are perceived as being removed from the domestic political spheres of both states. In this thesis, I explore the ways in which this crisis was a less surprising turn of events in US-Iranian relations and its broad impact in the United States domestic events throughout the 444 days.

The US media played a vital role in the way in which events in Tehran were reported. Since these events were occurring on the other hemisphere, the only personal experience an American was able to have with the crisis was through the news media. I argue that the American news media controlled the first substantive encounter between the average American and Iran. As such, I argue that the US media played a pivotal role in the narrative which grew out of the Iran Hostage Crisis. The media controlled many of the avenues by which Americans could gain historical background of US- Iranian relations before the crisis. Additionally, the United States media offered its own lenses through which Americans perceived the actions of the Iranian students and the state's leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. I will analyze the ways in which the news media created a narrative which juxtaposed the United States and Iran, allowing further assumptions to be drawn about the revolutionary Iranian state and the victimized United States. Through photographs, language, and video, journalists covering the hostage crisis were able to guide Americans toward these perceptions.

I aim to understand the media's formulation and narration of the crisis to the American population through an examination of nightly news broadcasts and newspapers from the crisis. While the Iran Hostage Crisis has been discussed extensively by David Farber and a media analysis of the crisis has been completed by R.E. Dowling, they fail to take into account the significance of the first and final days of the hostage crisis. As these days "book end" the event, holding the first and final moments of the crisis, they are crucial to analyze as they illuminate the foundation of the crisis narrative and its closing scenes. Primary news media from November 4 and 5, 1979 and January 19 and 20, 1981 will demonstrate the strategies by which these journalists began and concluded this narrative. Journalists' implications on these days are especially significant as they have ramifications on perceptions of US-Iranian relations throughout the hostage crisis and after it has concluded. This analysis will offer a more in depth view of the media's role within the crisis than that of Farber, who is more concerned by the step by step actions which resulted in the seizure. While Dowling follows the same media analysis, applying it to the hostage crisis, he does so broadly, covering the entirety of the 444 days. This work fails to consider the ways in which the crisis narrative is formulated, the early and late choices which define the crisis. *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, as well as CBS News offer ample source material for my analysis. Moreover, in order to understand the implications and role played by the US in the lead up to the hostage crisis, I analyze primary reports of American State Department officials. Through the Office of the Historian of the State Department, previously classified documents such as "Daily Situation Reports" and climate assessments may guide my research. Additionally, in 2014, The National Security Agency released an unredacted version of *The Battle For Iran*, which included the detailed the coup executed by American and British agents in Iran in 1953. This extensive resource outlines the

motives which guided the United States and Great Britain to act and describes sentiment of Iranian citizens throughout the operation. These accounts will offer a closer look to the coup and the relationships between the Shah, the CIA, and British Secret Intelligence which later became a root of Iranian anti-Americanism. In contrast to Farber, I use this historical background and classified sources to gain specific details from the primary actors in the events as they unfolded in 1953. My thesis examines the American political landscape, its leaders' motives throughout the hostage crisis, and domestic ramifications. I use the memoir of Jimmy Carter (*Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*) to offer a primary perspective of the President during the crisis. Finally, I use Ernest Bormann's fantasy theme method of rhetorical criticism in my analysis of American news media. Using *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and CBS News from November 4 and 5, 1979 and January 19 and 20, 1981, I will examine the methods by which a collective narrative is established by the media. The ways in which the central actors are described, the locations of events, and the actions reported upon by the media are crucial to the formulation and assessment of the crisis narrative.

Before the media analysis, I examine the foundations of the state of Iranian-US relations in the mid 20th century.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

1.1 The 1953 Coup

The strategic location of Iran meant that it had been under quasi British rule since the end of World War II. As foreign relations between the Soviet Union and other Allied powers continued to strain, many of these Allied leaders identified Iran as a potential place of communist infiltration. Reza Shah of the Pahlavi family had been the leader of the Iranian people from the beginning of the 1920s. He implemented many changes which created a modern and united Iranian state, bringing together the culturally diverse groups within the country. His power came to an early end in 1941 when he was forced to abdicate his throne due to British and Soviet pressures². Reza Shah had openly voiced his support for the Nazi regime, hoping to throw off British and Soviet control. Throughout the Shah's reign, Iran had been fluctuating between the pervasive influences of Great Britain and the Soviet Union, both aiming to use its natural resources and influence its political system for their own benefit. Hoping that the early battle successes of the Nazi regime during WWII could bring about a new world balance that would free itself from imperial control, Iran allied with the Axis powers³. As Iran sat in a significant geographic location during the war, touching the Soviet Union from both the east and west, as well as having access to oil and the Persian Gulf, the Allied powers were quite concerned regarding Iran's alliance. The Allies quickly put an end to this potential Axis power, invading

² Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, Chapter 2: 1953, (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), 22.

³ Nikolay A. Kozhanov, "The Pretexts and Reasons for the Allied Invasion of Iran in 1941," *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 4 (n.p. Iranian Studies, 2012): 479-97.

and occupying it. As the war concluded, the big three allied powers, Franklin Roosevelt of the United States, Winston Churchill of Great Britain, and Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, began to debate whether to return Iran to pseudo British and Soviet control or to offer the state self-determination⁴.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt demanded that both the Soviets and British leave Iran and allow them to establish their own government during negotiations in Tehran in 1943. The Declaration of the Allied Leaders on Iran assured the independence of Iran, reading the allied powers were all “at one with the Government of Iran in their desire for the maintenance of the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Iran”⁵. Thus, Reza Shah’s son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, became the leader of Iran at the young age of 21⁶. The actions of the United States in defense of Iranian sovereignty allowed a relatively strong relationship to be formed between the two countries. The United States agreed to allow Iran to purchase military weaponry, hoping to stave off interference from the Soviets. Additionally, Iran received financial assistance from the United States in the years after becoming independent. For instance, in 1952, \$23,450,000 was allocated for developmental assistance for Iran by President Truman⁷. As Cold War fears were leading much of American political decision-making, the United States was willing to appease this young leader’s desire to be a great military head of state⁸. The Shah’s prioritization of military might over the well-being of his citizens was examined with larger scrutiny by Iranians as other political alternatives began to call for change.

⁴ A.H. Hamzavi, “Iran and the Tehran Conference,” *International Affairs* 20 no. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, April 1944), 199.

⁵ Ibid, 199.

⁶ Ray Takeyh, "Iran under Occupation," In *The Last Shah: America, Iran, and the Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty*, (London: Yale University Press, 2021) 15.

⁷ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 26.

⁸ Ibid, 29.

As technology innovated during the second world war entered the domestic marketplace, oil became an essential good; its worth rapidly increased as it fueled the cars and planes which were now used by citizens and militaries alike. In the early 20th century, when Great Britain had played a more prominent role within Iran, the British put up capital to establish the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In 1908, they founded this business which would create vast wealth and it, alongside the British Imperial Bank of Persia, established Great Britain as the main western influence in Iran⁹. While this agreement offered the Iranian people a large pay day up front, this deal later soured in the eyes of the Iranians, as they saw much of the profit from this commodity, originating from their country, leave in the hands of foreigners. As many Iranians sought to resolve the economic struggles by managing their own people, government, and economy, these previous negotiations became unpopular¹⁰. At the start of 1950, a group of Iranian nationalists began to advocate for a renegotiation of the oil deal with the British. This group saw the oil deal as unacceptable and a demonstration of the West's continued presence in Iranian affairs. Additionally, the late 1940s and early 1950s were marked by multiple impoverished, but oil rich countries renegotiating their oil agreements with the West. Many of these countries would go on to be founding members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in September 1960.¹¹ Venezuela, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia all were able to achieve a 50-50 split of oil proceeds and begin to take back their own natural resource-driven economies. This galvanized Iranian confidence in forcing the British to renegotiate¹².

⁹ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 25.

¹⁰ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 26.

¹¹ "Member Countries," *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/25.htm

¹² Herbert E. Hansen, "Some Comments on Nationalization of Oil by OPEC Members," *Journal of Energy and Development* 1, vo. 2 (n.p. International Research Center for Energy and Development, 1976), 262.

The public sentiment within Iran had rapidly become more nationalistic, with many beginning to denounce any compromise with the British. Ali M. Ansari, an Associate fellow in the Middle East at Chatham House, reflects in his book *Confronting Iran* upon the radically shifting public opinion within Iran in the years leading up to the coup, writing, the “renewed synthesis between Shia Islam and Iranian identity and the exploitation of religious nationalism was highly effective in mobilizing the urban masses. It also ensured a radicalization of opinion into non-negotiable absolutes”¹³. Many Iranians were influenced by the *ulema*, the Iranian religious elite, who spoke out against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company as one of the last vestiges of British control of Iran. Muhammad Mossadegh, who would become the face of the movement to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, was born to a wealthy, landowning family and was educated in Europe, earning a doctorate in law, before returning to Iran. He became well known in Iranian politics after being jailed by the current Shah’s father for demanding a more open government. After forming the National Front, a coalition of people in support of the middle class who shared opposition to royal authority and foreign influence, Mossadegh began to advocate for no compromises regarding the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company¹⁴. This line of argument grew very popular with the Iranian general public and nationalization became an immovable force.¹⁵ The United States State Department commented with increasing concern regarding this change in political demands, writing a memorandum to the Policy Planning Staff, “Nationalization has gone so far in the minds of the Iranians that there is no prospect whatever of a ‘negotiated’ settlement. Feeling is running so high that the best that might be salvaged from the

¹³ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 29.

¹⁴ W. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Chapter 14 – Democracy and Authoritarianism, (n.p. Routledge, May 2018), 290.

¹⁵ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 29.

present situation is an operating contract for the British, although even this is only a possibility”¹⁶. The Prime Minister spoke out against Mossadeh’s radical demand to throw out the British and four days later he was assassinated¹⁷. This violent act was a proclamation in favor of Mossadeh’s platform and encouraged the *Majlis* (Parliament) to vote to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. As the man who had spearheaded this movement, Mossadeh was named the new Prime Minister of Iran April 28, 1951¹⁸. The fearful Shah agreed to these decisions, concerned that this group’s nationalistic behavior could be turned against him as well¹⁹.

As Prime Minister Mossadeh attempted to maintain his power within Iran against numerous internal adversarial groups, he pivoted around the political spectrum, avoiding any true partisan stance. Mossadeh’s relations with other countries were no different than his internal political evasion. The United States and Great Britain halted all imports of Iranian oil, attempting to force Mossadeh to speak with them regarding Iran’s political future, however, he dodged these inquiries. As he had laid witness to the tumultuous political atmosphere within Iran, with the last two prime ministers, Razmara and Ala’, being assassinated and replaced after 46 days respectively, Mossadeh was weary of his opposition²⁰. If he was perceived to be negotiating with the western states which he vehemently rejected in order to get into power, his opposition

¹⁶ Memorandum From Henry Villard of the Policy Planning Staff to the Chairman of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze) Department of State, Iran 1951-1954, May 24, 1951, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d29>.

¹⁷ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 29.

¹⁸ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 30.

¹⁹ Progress Report Prepared for the National Security Council, State Department, Foreign Relations of the United States, Iran 1951-1954, May 31, 1951. Accessed January 13, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d31>

²⁰ Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Office of Current Intelligence, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, Iran 1951 – 1954, April 30, 1951, accessed January 23, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d19>

could potentially end his political career and his life. Instead, Mossadegh continued his nationalistic and vague rhetoric, gaining support of the Tudeh Party within Iran. This communist faction was well known within the United States as a Cold War concern²¹. As Ali M. Ansari points out, the relationship between Iran and the United States, especially American paranoia, “had a certain circularity. Western anxiety increased pressure on Mossadegh, who in turn was forced to take on more drastic autocratic powers and become increasingly dependent on the Left, particularly the Tudeh Party”²². The Prime Minister’s association with this group further condemned him in the eyes of the United States government.

Even after the radical action taken by Iranian leadership to appease supporters of the National Front, namely the election of Mossadegh as Prime Minister and the move to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the revolutionary spirit was still present in Iran. Iranians continued to protest and demand change, although their political goals were not clear. In fact, the United States felt that Iran was not taking enough action to quell the more radical parts of the political upheaval. In a progress report offered to the National Security Council, the State Department reflected, “The present Iranian Government not only has done nothing to restore calm but has shown every indication of desiring to keep the Iranian people at a high emotional pitch”²³. The public sentiment which had brought about this new wave of policy in Iran and established Mossadegh as Prime Minister was still present and being fostered by the Iranian government. The revolutionary zeal of the people was still guiding much action by the Iranian

²¹ David Patrick Houghton, “Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis: A Cognitive Perspective” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 2, (2006), 267.

²² Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 35.

²³ Progress Report Prepared for the National Security Council, State Department, Foreign Relations of the United States, Iran 1951-1954, May 31, 1951, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d31>

government and causing widespread protests. The United States recognized an opportunity to capitalize upon the “high emotional pitch” of the Iranian people. In October of 1952, discussions began to plot to remove this Iranian leader and replace him with an individual who would be more favorable to the United States²⁴. Edward Said, a well reputed literary scholar who formulated the critical concept of orientalism, reflected on a coup which happened more than thirty years later, but which followed the same goals as Eisenhower’s original. Said asserted that the Iran Contra Affair, like the coup of 1953, was “nothing less than an attempted coup whose goals were either the fomenting of prolonged instability in Iran or the accession to power of some person or group less hostile to the U.S. and Israel” ²⁵.

Under President Eisenhower, the United States foreign policy began to change. In the midst of the Cold War, Eisenhower sought to maintain American superiority against the Soviets, while also being as economical and subvert as possible. Putting greater emphasis on the CIA and foreign operatives, Eisenhower was able to side step congressional approval for his military actions and maintain plausible deniability²⁶. In the days before the coup, the British and the Americans worked together to create the appearance of a popular movement against Mossadegh and in favor of the Shah. Hiring rough and tumble individuals to begin rioting in streets, paying of Iranian military leadership who were at odds with the prime minister, and opening discussions of a coup with the Shah, the CIA began plans for Operation Ajax²⁷.

²⁴ 1953 Iran Coup : New U.S. Documents Confirm British approached U.S. in Late 1952 About Ousting Mossadeq, *National Security Archive*, August 8, 2017, accessed December 11, 2020, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/iran/2017-08-08/1953-iran-coup-new-us-documents-confirm-british-approached-us-late>.

²⁵ Edward W. Said, “Irangate: A Many-Sided Crisis,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 4 (Berkley: Institute for Palestine Studies), 28.

²⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, “The 1953 Coup in Iran,” *Science & Society* 65, no. 2 (n.p. Guilford Press, 2001), 197.

²⁷ David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America’s First Encounter with Radical Islam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 56.

The operation's leader, Kermit Roosevelt, the grandson of President Franklin Roosevelt, subtly began to accrue a mob to pour into the streets in favor of the removal of Mossadegh. With only \$100,000 in cash, he was able to pull together a spark which would ignite a call to throw out the current leadership. There were concerns whether the operation would succeed, with a few individual arrested in the days leading up to the event. Rumors of American involvement in a coup attempt then began to sweep Iran, causing some outbursts in the streets demanding the Americans not interfere. The Shah fled Iran for Italy, concerned it would turn violent. He was only calmed upon hearing word from "the American," Kermit Roosevelt²⁸. After the pro-Shah military restored peace to the streets, Roosevelt's mob came out from behind the scenes and began to destroy pro-Mossadegh newspapers and seek out and punish communist Tudeh Party members²⁹. Tens of thousands of Iranian citizens also took to the streets and began to advocate for change with Roosevelt's forces, frustrated with the current leadership. Mossadegh quickly fled Tehran and the Shah returned from Italy to lead the Iranian people³⁰.

Eisenhower was pleased with the success of the clandestine operation led by Roosevelt. While there were some concerns early on in the planning process, the execution and success of the mission allowed for greater control of Iran by the United States. Eisenhower wrote of the mission in his Diary on Iran, released by the NSA some 50 plus years after the mission took place:

Another recent development that we helped bring about was the restoration of the Shah to power in Iran and the elimination of Mossadegh. The things we did were "covert." If knowledge of them became public, we would not be embarrassed in that region, but our

²⁸ Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, August 17, 1953, Foreign Relations of the United States, Iran 1951-1954, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d271>

²⁹ Moyara De Moraes Ruehsen, "Operation 'Ajax' Revisited: Iran, 1953," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 3 (n.p. Taylor & Francis, 1993), 480.

³⁰ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 36.

chances do anything of like nature in the future would almost totally disappear. Nevertheless our agent there, a member of the CIA, worked intelligently, courageously and tirelessly³¹.

Eisenhower's concern regarding maintaining Operation Ajax as covert highlights a consistent aim throughout his presidency. Eisenhower's military experience as a general and leader of the Allied forces in European theater influenced his style of foreign diplomacy. He firmly believed that subvert missions to actively influence the political structures of other countries behind the scenes would allow for greater success in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. This strategy of denial and silence continued both before and after the coup took place. U.S. Ambassador Loy Henderson wrote to the State Department in the days after the coup was proved successful and encouraged no comment by the United States in regards to the coup, even denying it played a part of the events. He wrote, "Zahedi's Government like all governments of Iran eventually will become unpopular and at that time US might be blamed for its existence" ³². Zahedi was the newly appointed prime minister of Iran after the fall of Mossadegh. In time Henderson was proved right, although silence did little to convince the Iranians of America's lack of involvement. While the mission to reestablish the Shah's leadership was a success and there were no official discoveries of the participation of the United States in a coup attempt, the Iranian people believed they knew what had happened behind closed doors. The CIA's participation in the coup and the common knowledge of this incident within the Iranian general public deeply impacted Iranians' perspective upon the United States.³³ This decision by the

³¹ Eisenhower Diary Covering Iran 10/8/1953, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Iran 1951-1954, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d328>.

³² No.351 The Ambassador in Iran (Henderson) to Department, August 21, 1953, Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Iran 1951-1954, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v10/d351>.

³³ Houghton, "Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis," 270-271.

United States would become a spot of contention between the American government and the general public of Iran in the years to come.

1.2 From White Revolution to Iranian Revolution

After Muhammad Reza Shah returned to power, he significantly limited the political rights of his people. He ensured he would not lose power again by being hyper-attentive to the dissenting groups within the country and their followers. He instituted SAVAK, a covert military-style police force which punished those who openly disavowed the Shah. This group became infamous for its brutal human rights abuses against Iranian citizens³⁴. The enforcement of the Shah's power bred fear amongst the Iranian people, encouraging the majority of the population to bear their hardships in silence and hold in their disdain for the Shah's brutality and political choices³⁵. Additionally, Muhammad Reza Shah instituted a group of policies including land reform and cultural changes which would allow Iran to modernize, hoping to foster a sense of indebtedness in Iranians. The group of policy decisions put forth by Reza Shah to institute these changes was referred to as the "White Revolution," as it was essentially bloodless³⁶. The United States fully supported this plan of action, recognizing it as a necessary step to move Iran into the 20th century. In the 1970s, there was a Mandatory Declassification Review request made regarding the United States role in Iran. The document composed was entitled *The Battle for Iran*, detailing the atmosphere in Iran prior to the coup attempt in 1953 as well as details of the

³⁴ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 60.

³⁵ Desmond Harney, *The Priest and the King: An Eye Witness Account of the Iranian Revolution*, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998), 29.

³⁶ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 249.

coup. The United States praised Iran for its realization that military might alone cannot breed success and support of a state's people.

A powerful army, a modern air force, and a well-equipped navy cannot be built in a vacuum. Changes in the country's social and economic structure to improve national health and educational levels were necessary to provide adequate manpower for these forces[...] The success of the White Revolution—that is, reform and change directed from the top—has solidified the foundations of the throne that seemed so shaky and insecure in the violent days of 1952 and 1953³⁷.

This White Revolution offered new opportunities to Iranian citizens in the realms of education, gender equality, and land reform. However, the political motives of the White Revolution also to fruition, as the Shah worked to undermine the middle class and establish support in the peasant, landless class³⁸. These changes broke with traditional Iranian societal expectations tied to Islam, leaving many of the religious elite within Iran feeling as though their power had been limited. This “revolution” was not as smoothly implemented as the Shah originally hoped, with conservative agitation taking place in city streets³⁹. White Revolution policies were now replacing the solutions given by the religious elite. This left the religious leadership angry, as the Shah's political solutions conflicted with Islamic teaching, further demeaning their relevance.

Despite these flagrant human rights violations, the United States maintained a strong relationship with Iran after the coup. The commitment demonstrated by American leadership to keep the Shah in power, while mostly led by Cold War fears, was still present, and as such, the United States maintained a strong trade relationship with Iran. As the American presidency continued to change hands, from Eisenhower, to Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford, the

³⁷ *The Battle for Iran*, 2014, National Security Archive, 79-80, accessed December 7, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v10/d351>.

³⁸ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 295.

³⁹ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 49.

relationship rarely faltered⁴⁰. In *The Battle for Iran*, the US State Department reflected upon United States – Iran relations, as well as the Shah’s maintained power and military strategy.

While by no means a dedicated western ally, Iran retains its fear of the Soviets, and the enormous wealth that it has gained from the increased value of oil... is still being used to build strong military forces not only for self-defense but to support Iranian aspirations for dominance in the Persian Gulf as well⁴¹.

This mutually beneficial relationship, with the United States supplying Iran weapons and maintaining a foothold in the Middle East, allowed relations strengthen between the two. Occasional oil price hikes caused tension, but overwhelmingly America’s need for oil and an ally in the Middle East encouraged American officials to turn a blind eye to the Shah’s misdeeds.

The government structure was now fortified within Iran, with the Shah sitting at the top and hand selecting who sat beneath him. Popular sentiments which had forced him to surrender his power in the 1950s were monitored closely and consistent limitations on political rights caused citizens to remain silent. This non-democratic governmental form clashed with United States’ political values, but the United States was more interested in maintaining relations than encouraging real change in Iran. Commenting upon the reality of political life in Iran, the State Department wrote, “There is little question as to who is running Iran, of course; the Shah has a monopoly on political power, and although parliamentary elections and procedures may furnish the window dressing of democratic government, it is the Shah alone who determines national policy”⁴². Surprisingly, even amidst the limited political climate within Iran, some individuals spoke up and were able to achieve some success in their criticism of the Shah and advocacy for different platforms. In 1961, the Freedom Movement Party was founded by Mehdi Bazaragan,

⁴⁰ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 44.

⁴¹ *The Battle for Iran*, 2014, 79.

⁴² *The Battle for Iran*, 2014, 79.

who would become the Prime Minister of Iran in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. His party advocated for the entrance of reformist Islam into the politics of the state⁴³.

This spurred later opposition groups in 1963, most prominently led by a religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini had come under fire from the government in 1964 after speaking out against the policy of capitulations, particularly Iran's willingness to house United States military. His commentary thrust him into high regard with the Iranian public, especially as the anti-American rhetoric allowed the Shah to become labeled as an American puppet⁴⁴. These comments also caught the attention of the Shah, who then identified him as a political threat and exiled him. Khomeini lived in exile for 15 years and was able to maintain support in Iran through recordings of his political speeches which were dispersed in Iran. In these recordings, he asserted that the religious elite, of which he was a part, ought to lead Iran as they would be a true representation of the culture and values of the Iranian people. Labeling the Shah as a "stooge of the West," he claimed that the Shah had no right to lead the country and was selling Iran to the corrupt Americans⁴⁵. This proclamation was defended by two instances of the Shah's poor leadership, the White Revolution and the prohibition of demonstrations commemorating the martyrdom of Iman Husayn. Reiterating the juxtaposition of the White Revolution with Islamic law, Khomeini asserted that these policies demonstrated the Shah's willingness to sacrifice his country to appease the western states. Similarly, the attempts to limit religious demonstrations in reflected poorly on the Shah, as it was argued by Khomeini to be interpreted as a rejection of Islam and Muslim culture in Iran. When demonstrations to honor Husayn, the grandson of the

⁴³ Saeed Barzin, "Constitutionalism and Democracy in the Religious Ideology of Mehdi Bazargan," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 1, (n.p. Taylor and Francis, 1994), 88.

⁴⁴ Ansari, *Confronting the West*, Chapter 3: 1979, 77.

⁴⁵ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 77-78 .

Islamic prophet Muhammad, began, disregarding the martial law, there were massive riots within Iran.⁴⁶ SAVAK was called in to quell the violence and many were killed, injured and arrested. The Shah's attempt to halt this outcry instead demonstrated the supremacy of religion within Iran, even over the power of the Shah⁴⁷. While Khomeini was exiled to Iraq for his political actions, he incited larger opposition within Iran and continued to do so, even from abroad.

The 1970s proved difficult for Iran, especially economically. While oil allowed prosperity for some, many within the country were largely untouched by this wealth, living in poverty. Jahangir Amuzegar, Iranian economist and Minister of Commerce and Finance of Iran in 1962, reflected upon the overarching economic improvements in Iran under the Shah, as well as the continued income gaps. Amuzegar wrote, "Urban-rural income gaps (and income inequalities within each sector) did not narrow"⁴⁸. While absolute poverty did decrease, the gaps between groups did not shrink, causing great frustration and calls for action. The gap in economic status of Iranian citizens created pent up frustrations with the political elite who encouraged this structure⁴⁹. Much of this discontent was tied to the United States. Iranian citizens drew upon the events of 1953 when reflecting on the United States' influence on Iran. Additionally, they viewed the United States with distrust because American leadership turned a blind eye to the Shah's human rights violations and enabled him to prioritize the military over his people. The turmoil of the 1970s was also capitalized upon by Ayatollah Khomeini. Dispersing cassette tapes of his voice recordings on the streets of Iranian cities, he was able to spread his

⁴⁶ Arthur Goldschmidt, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, Chapter 8 – The Reassertion of Islamic Power, (n.p. Westview Press, November 2012), 341.

⁴⁷ Harney, *The Priest and the King*, 99-103.

⁴⁸ Jahangir Amuzegar, "The Iranian Economy before and after the Revolution," *Middle East Journal*, Vol 46, no. 3, (n.p. Middle East Institute, 1992), 414.

⁴⁹ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 86-87.

religious message and plant the seed of revolution⁵⁰. Often calling the United States the “Great Satan” using the Iranian belief in Satan as a great tempter, in this case of materialism and immorality, Khomeini’s rhetoric was quite captivating⁵¹. In 1978, protests began in earnest as the Shah’s new economic policies caused a recession. Students, merchants, and elites took to the streets in urban areas, reflecting their lack of faith in the current leadership and their desire for change. One of the most pivotal moments in these political protests was the military’s attempt to break up a protest in Qom on January 9, 1978. As they opened fire into the protesters, many died, spurring further outcry. Most significantly, as those who died were put to rest, funeral processions typical of Muslim tradition began in Qom. People poured into the streets in mourning and it appeared as both a religious and political scene. This dynamic was crucial to the presentation of the revolution as an Islamic driven force⁵².

As the end of 1978 neared, protests began to increase in passion and participation. On September 8th, thousands of Iranian citizens poured into the streets in protest, ignoring the government’s ban on such political gatherings. The military was called in to stop it and began to use violence against the protesters. Hundreds died and their deaths signified the turning of the tides towards anti-Shah groups within Iran, the day later called “Black Friday”⁵³. In the beginning of December, as citizens were celebrating the Islamic holiday Moharram, mass protests began again and became more political in tone as the military joined the ranks of the protesters⁵⁴. Many individuals witnessing the revolution of Iran from within the state were not pleased with the radical situation unfolding before them. Desmond Harney, a British diplomat

⁵⁰Goldschmidt, *Concise History of the Middle East*, 343 .

⁵¹ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, Chapter 2: 1953, 87.

⁵² Goldschmidt, *Concise History of the Middle East*, 342.

⁵³ Harney, *The Priest and the King*, 99-103.

⁵⁴ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 80.

and banker who had lived in Iran for more than a decade, reflected on the concerning aspects of the revolution in his eyewitness account, *The Priest in the King*. In the final days of the Shah's tenure, Harney explained his fears regarding this change in Iranian government.

One asks if the regime deserves to succeed after all this? One feels it does not: and certainly if one was in a democracy the government would be out on its ear at the next election. But here is the awful problem posed by autocracy: the alternative is almost always worse, if only because of the repressed bitterness and frustration. So one clings to what has, hoping it will change (which it won't and probably can't) until it is finally swept away in some appalling revolution⁵⁵.

Harney's fears came to fruition in the final days of 1978. After numerous attempts to appease the demands of the groups demanding change, the Shah recognized that he would not be able to continue to lead the state of Iran. He left on vacation January 16, 1979 and never returned⁵⁶. Many Iranians differed from Harney, interpreting the Shah's departure as the conclusion of a corrupt and immoral chapter in Iranian history, with Ayatollah Khomeini ready to return the citizenry to its Islamic roots. Less than a month later, Khomeini returned to Iran, celebrated by Iranians, while international audiences saw him as "a medieval theocrat, irrationality personified"⁵⁷. While the swift change of power allowed Iranians confidence in their ability to demand, future decisions regarding the new governmental structure would not be as simple.

In an effort to begin establishing their restructured government, Bazaragan was named as the Prime Minister of Iran. As he had before, he began to advocate for moderate changes in the government to comply with Islam. He was able to quell the protests and sought to unite individuals under the new Iranian state, hoping to build a secular government which was guided by Islamic tradition⁵⁸. At the same time, Khomeini began to formulate his own councils in the

⁵⁵ Harney, *The Priest and the King*, 75.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 144-147.

⁵⁷ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 83.

⁵⁸ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 86.

hopes of shifting Iran into an Islamic Republic. Attempting to mobilize support for his political faction, suppress anti-revolutionary opinions, and open preliminary investigations about Iran's compliance with religious laws, Khomeini laid the foundation for his later take over⁵⁹.

In March of 1979, it was decided that Iran would be an Islamic Republic rather than a monarchy⁶⁰. While this was rather uncontroversial, in June, the government began to shift more dramatically. Prime Minister Bazargan proposed a constitution for the new Islamic state without judicial and administrative powers allotted to the religious establishment. This proposal was quickly refuted, as a group of experts was called in to reconstruct the draft. The revised constitution required all of Iran's laws and regulations to be based on Islamic law and standards. This group also created the position of Supreme Islamic Jurist who would be the new religious and political leader of the Iranian Islamic State⁶¹. Quickly shifting from an Islam guided and more secular government to an Islamic state, Iran became almost synonymous with Khomeini and his radical perspective. From the viewpoint of the United States, this revolution and the swift shift to a new era of U.S. Iran relations was gravely concerning. Islam was seen as "an unacceptably expanding onslaught against Western civilization and, paradoxically, a welcome confirmation of how Islamic politics were medieval, sectarian, and evil" ⁶². As such, Iran's abrupt change was seen as more than just a political issue, but a moral concern as well, placing it firmly in the line of fire for the United States and its media.

⁵⁹ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 127.

⁶⁰ Goldschmidt, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, 344.

⁶¹ Ibid, 344.

⁶² Said, "Irangate," 33.

1.3 US During the 1970s

The 1970s were marked by economic difficulties in the US. The surprising combination of inflation and unemployment, created “stagflation,” or a stagnant economy with ballooning prices⁶³. The creation of OPEC, a conglomeration of oil producing countries which worked together to set higher prices for oil, fostered an oil crisis in 1973. This crisis hit the United States especially hard, with prices rising to new heights and fears of shortages causing cars to line up at stations for hours to fill up⁶⁴. The Women’s Rights and Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s also began to take root in American daily life, as legislation began to normalize demands for racial and gender equality of the decade prior⁶⁵. Additionally, the United States’ presidency was shown not to be above reproach, as President Nixon publicly fell from grace in 1974 after ordering individuals to break into the Watergate Hotel to steal information from the opposing party regarding his reelection bid⁶⁶. The Watergate scandal brought about new skepticism regarding the American political establishment and shattered many of the exceptionalism beliefs that had defined American politics for much of the 20th century⁶⁷. American perceptions of their nation as the torchbearer of freedom and prosperity no longer seemed as guaranteed as it had in years past. The economic prosperity that had grown out of World War II reconstruction was no longer assured, with the 1970s dropping the median income growth of all families from \$10,000 from 1960 to 1970 to an increase of only \$2,000 from 1970 to 1980⁶⁸.

⁶³ Robert B., Barsky and Kilian Lutz, "Do We Really Know That Oil Caused the Great Stagflation? A Monetary Alternative." *NBER Macroeconomics Annual* 16 (2001): 137-83.

⁶⁴ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 21-22.

⁶⁵ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 15.

⁶⁶ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 58.

⁶⁷ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 17.

⁶⁸ Money Income of Families – Median Income in Current and Constant (1997) Dollars, by Race and Type of Family: 1947 to 1997, US Census, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/99statab/sec31.pdf>

By the time James Earl Carter was running for president in 1976, Americans were frustrated. The trajectory of the decade and the political environment was not what these citizens had envisioned for the decade, and as such, many wanted to change up the political environment which had created these issues. As a one-term governor, Carter was perceived as an outsider. He was well-educated and passionate, but lacked association with previous corrupt politicians. Many Americans believed that Carter could change the dynamic of the 1970s with a fresh perspective. As he ran on an anti-Washington platform, asserting his dislike for political maneuvering and quid pro quo deal-making, he surprised many by gaining the Democratic ticket and later the presidency. Carter's popularity quickly began to deteriorate, however, as he struggled to work with Congress to pass the legislation he proposed. As the economy still struggled, Carter was seen as unable to handle the duties before him and politic the country out of distress. While in the first year of his presidency, he held moderate approval, with an average approval rating above 50%, his approval began to slip below the majority in 1978⁶⁹. Labeling oneself as an outsider and identifying Washington as the corrupt enemy may have been good for winning votes, but it proved to be a problem for Carter as soon as he earned the office. Much of the establishment in Washington D.C. did not want to work with Carter to achieve his platform as they did not appreciate his portrayal of them as corrupt and unconcerned with the desires of their constituents⁷⁰.

On the eve of the hostage crisis, a little over a year before he would seek reelection, Carter was entering unprecedented territory. His approval ratings were plummeting further than any president in recent memory. In early October 1979, one month before the hostage crisis, he

⁶⁹ "Presidential Job Approval of Jimmy Carter," *American Presidency Project*, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-job-approval>

⁷⁰ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 77.

only had 29% approval⁷¹. With such a short amount of time until the 1980 election, his poor approval ratings were of great concern. The only two presidents to have lower approval ratings in the last 30 years were President Truman at 22% in the midst of the Korean War after firing General MacArthur and President Nixon at 24% in the days before his resignation⁷². President Carter's attempts to lead the country were poorly received by the large majority. His efforts to stop American dependence on foreign oil by allowing the national government to allocate interstate natural gas through the Emergency Natural Gas Act caused backlash, with memories of the oil crisis of 1973 encouraging a negative view of these efforts. While the proposed package was passed by Congress, endorsing its political merits, Carter's popularity was not impacted by its passage⁷³. Similarly, when he asked the Federal Reserve to raise the interest rate to limit the rampant inflation, his allegiance to the Democratic platform was called into question⁷⁴. Most importantly, the American people saw President Carter as a weak and unconfident leader. His Secretary of State informed him of the why Americans viewed him as an inadequate leader, specifically his perceived lack of concern for American citizens' problems and a group of cronies leading his office. This information led him towards resurrecting his presidency in July 1979⁷⁵. Pledging major reform and acknowledging the serious problems of the country in regards to energy and national confidence, he gave arguably the most famous speech of his presidency.

It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation... Our people are losing that faith, not only in government itself but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate

⁷¹ "Presidential Job Approval of Jimmy Carter," *American Presidency Project*.

⁷² Presidential Approval Ratings –Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends, Low Individual Measurements, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>.

⁷³ Martin B. Shaffer, "An Aerial Photograph of Presidential Leadership; President Carter's National Energy Plan Revisited," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 25, no 2, (n.p. Wiley, 1995), 291.

⁷⁴ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 83.

⁷⁵ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 33-34.

rulers and shapers of our democracy. As a people we know our past and we are proud of it. Our progress has been part of the living history of America, even the world. We always believed that we were part of a great movement of humanity itself called democracy, involved in the search for freedom, and that belief has always strengthened us in our purpose. But just as we are losing our confidence in the future, we are also beginning to close the door on our past⁷⁶.

While his approval grew in the immediate aftermath of the speech, rising from 28% to a high of 33% in August 1979, Carter squandered this rise in approval when he applied this crisis of confidence speech to his own office⁷⁷. In the days following this speech, he asked each of his cabinet members for a letter of resignation and reflected upon the status of his leadership. He accepted 5 cabinet resignations in an attempt to shake up his presidency and increase his chances for reelection the coming year⁷⁸. This was decision seen by the American public as a waste of time in the face of the problems of the United States, his approval ratings slipping to the same moderate approval as before the speech. President Carter again mis-stepped, most viewing these last minute decisions as another representation of his poor leadership and decision-making⁷⁹.

Relations with Iran also began to adjust during the Carter administration beginning in 1976. Running on a platform of honesty and transparency, as well as holding our allies to American principles of freedom and democracy, Carter felt a greater duty to encourage the Shah towards the democratization of Iran.⁸⁰ The continued reforms encouraged by the Carter administration catalyzed Iranian anger at the West for its interference and unawareness of Islamic beliefs which were in opposition to these reforms. An eyewitness to the revolution in Iran later reflected upon the United States' hand in the Shah's unraveling, writing, "Carter had

⁷⁶ President Carter, "Energy and National Goals: Address to the Nation," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, July 15, 1979, accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/speeches/energy-crisis.phtml>.

⁷⁷ Presidential Job Approval of Jimmy Carter, *The American Presidency Project*.

⁷⁸ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 33.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 34.

⁸⁰ *The Battle for Iran* 2014, National Security Archive, 79.

unwittingly precipitated this, but now is unhappy at having to live with the consequences. His beautiful, human-righteous alternative is failing to appear – and his benevolent autocrat has had to become a harsh autocrat”⁸¹.

1.4 Overview of Beginning of Hostage Crisis

At 10:00 am on November 4, 1979, protests within Tehran, Iran flared up for another day amidst the revolutionary atmosphere in the capital city. This urban setting had become a breeding ground for widespread outcry and demonstrations in the months before and after the dictatorial Shah’s removal. The United States embassy had become a common protesting location in Tehran, as young revolutionaries desired to express their distrust and hatred for the western imperialism they had experienced under American diplomacy. In fact, more than six months prior, the United States embassy was taken hostage and the military was called in to remove the protesters⁸². This fourth day of November began similarly to this previous hostage situation. Unfortunately, the removal of these student revolutionaries would take far longer.

A group of roughly 400 Iranian students, which referred to itself as “The Muslim Students Following the Imam’s Line,” overtook the American embassy in Tehran, Iran, taking 66 individuals hostage⁸³. These students were dedicated supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini and desired to aid in the creation of an Islamic Republic in Iran. This group hoped that a strong anti-western and anti-American act would bolster support for Khomeini and discredit the current nationalist government. These students who overtook the embassy theorized the reactions from

⁸¹ Harney, *The Priest and the King*, 105.

⁸² Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 84.

⁸³ Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar, “Causes of the US Hostage Crisis in Iran: The Untold Account of the Communist Threat,” *Security Studies* 26, no. 4 (n.p. Taylor and Francis, 2017): 668.

Bazargan and Khomeini would vary significantly, causing a shift in support towards the ayatollah. They assumed the prime minister would attempt to quell the anger and radical anti-western movements that were likely to grow out of the hostage situation, whereas Khomeini would endorse their act as an attempt by the students to take control of their own country⁸⁴. The predictions were correct, although they did not anticipate the length of the hostage situation. This group only expected to remain in the embassy for a few days, assuming they would release the hostages after Bazargan was removed from power⁸⁵. As news of the hostage situation swept across Iran and the globe, the anti-American sentiments were even more radical than the students anticipated. Feeling that this shift could create more change in Iran, these students prolonged their stay in the embassy. The act against the American embassy and broader American foreign diplomacy served to solidify Iran and rally support around Khomeini, creating a united Iranian state for the first time since the revolution. While in the days after the Revolution, many groups still sought to gain power, believing that the revolution was far from over, the anti-American aspect of the crisis gave credence to Khomeini and his followers, quelling opposition⁸⁶. This simple plan to establish a united Iranian Islamic State, free from domestic and foreign interference, became an international crisis, one which lasted 444 days and catastrophically impacted Iran – American relations for decades to come⁸⁷.

In the days leading up to the takeover, these students meticulously created a plan for the seizure of the embassy and discussed who would take part in the day's events⁸⁸. They hoped

⁸⁴ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 139-142.

⁸⁵ Tabaar, "The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," 689.

⁸⁶ Tabaar, "The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," 691.

⁸⁷ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, "Iran's Hostage Crisis: International Legitimacy Matters," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25, no. 2 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 273-278.

⁸⁸ Tabaar, "The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," 688-689.

their actions would throw out the nationalist government which had been established in Iran after the Shah's departure. The removal of this preliminary government was not the only objective, as the students aimed to offer support to an Islamic state led by Khomeini. While there were many leftist groups which could have helped with the takeover, as they too held anti-American sentiments, this student group refused to let any of these groups participate because they were not in favor of an Islamic government⁸⁹. Fearing their action would be accredited to the leftist groups within Iran which were vying for power, the hostage takers monitored the list of hostage takers, even taking attendance at the gate of the embassy to ensure only their own people were present⁹⁰.

The group of hostage takers reached out to Khomeini in the days leading up to the takeover, hoping to make him aware of their plan of action so that he could use it to his advantage politically, capitalizing on the anti-American sentiment which was likely to arise. Khomeini's rhetoric had been blatantly anti-American and anti-western as efforts grew to throw out the Shah, however, after Reza Shah was removed and Khomeini established his own power within Iran, this vocalization by the Imam quieted. These students hoped to enlighten Khomeini regarding their plans in the hopes that he would use this act to reassert his anti-western rhetoric, uniting Iran against a common enemy⁹¹. While they did not speak with him directly, they did speak with a colleague, Ayatollah Mousavi Khoeihi, who told them that although Khomeini would likely agree in principle, he might have difficulty publicly endorsing the act⁹². These

⁸⁹ Tabaar, "The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," 688-690.

⁹⁰ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 131 .

⁹¹ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 129.

⁹² Houghton, "Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis: A Cognitive Perspective," 265.

individuals were not discouraged by this conversation, as they continued forward with their plan, eventually gaining Khomeini's endorsement for their anti-western action two days after the fact.

Mohammad Tabaar, who studies international security and Middle East politics as an associate professor at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, argues in "Causes of the US Hostage Crisis in Iran: The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," that the efforts of these students were not solely aimed to halt American interference in Iranian affairs. There was growing support for the Tudeh Party within Iran, as well as other leftist groups, which were supported by the fledgling Soviet state. This student group wanted the Iranian leadership to remain in the hands of the conservative religious elite and prevent power from changing hands to the leftist groups. These competing groups asserted that those in favor of an Islamic republic were not truly for Iran because they were not as against western imperialism and America as they believed themselves to be. As the sentiments within Iran were radically anti-American and anti-western, this label was difficult to remove and a very serious accusation. Tabaar claims that the "Muslim Students Following the Imam's Line" decided to overtake the embassy in part to demonstrate they were most anti-American group and neutralize their opposition⁹³.

Upon gaining entry to the embassy, these students rapidly filed into the compound, clearing the floors of the building and securing the hostages. The American Embassy's protocols were enacted as soon as the students entered the property. The State Department of the United States had established stringent protocols in the case of a takeover as the atmosphere in Iran began to shift during the revolution. During the revolution, the staff had been limited significantly in case of violence, from an original staff of 1100 to less than 75⁹⁴. There was great

⁹³ Tabaar, "The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," 694.

⁹⁴ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, (New York City: Bantam Books, 1982), 453.

concern within the State Department that the US Embassy could be seized and its classified documents released to the Iranian public. Thus, protocols were put in place that in the case of a takeover, two employees would go into the file room and begin to shred and burn all documents kept in the embassy. The day of the November takeover, two embassy employees followed this protocol and began shredding and burning these documents. While they were able to destroy a portion of the documents, the process took far longer than anticipated. The Iranian students seized the rest of the undestroyed documents when these employees were discovered. After piecing back together some of the shredded paper and discovering some documents in a safe to which the embassy employees did not have access, the students released these documents⁹⁵. Entitling them as “Documents from the U.S. Espionage Den,” these releases publicized the reality of American action within Iran. One such document showed that the State Department knew of the 1953 coup before it took place, officially implicating the United States. With the suspicions of Iranians confirmed, these releases further broke down trust between the United States and Iranian governments, quashing hope for negotiations that would return the hostages⁹⁶.

After the students had achieved control of the embassy, they waited to see the reaction from both the current government under Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and the rising popular support for an Islamic republic led by Ayatollah Khomeini. As the nationalist government, established in the wake of the Shah’s departure from Iran, was still under pressure from revolutionary Iran, many saw this leadership as unstable and likely to fall. Additionally, as Bazargan had sought to work with the Shah in an exchange of power prior to the revolution, groups against this nationalist government saw the Prime Minister and his appointed leadership

⁹⁵ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 131-133.

⁹⁶ David Banks, “The Diplomatic Presentation of The State in International Crises: Diplomatic Collaboration during the US-Iran Hostage Crisis” *International Studies Quarterly* 63, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1172.

as western puppets who did not serve Iranian interests⁹⁷. Bazargan and his underlings were tainted by the negative connotation of being associated with the Shah, even if they were a part of his opposition. This interpretation was validated during the early part of the hostage crisis, as the Iranian government encouraged the students to leave the embassy⁹⁸. As the hostage situation was widely supported within the state, this stance in opposition to it did not bode well for Bazargan. Related issues between the Prime Minister and public sentiment, including the debate regarding the prominence of Islam within the revolutionary government, demonstrated that the current leadership would not last much longer. Bazargan's more moderate stances about Iran's new governmental body were now seen as weak and compromising, lacking the more impassioned political rhetoric of Khomeini.

On December 2nd and 3rd, less than a month after the hostage crisis began, a new constitution was put to referendum and the nationalist government fell, making the way for a new Iranian government under Khomeini⁹⁹. Unlike the nationalist government, Khomeini offered immediate support to the hostage takers, demonstrating his anti-western and anti-American commitments within Iran. He interpreted the actions committed by the Iranian students as a refusal of Iran to remain under the control of the United States¹⁰⁰. These students represented the grassroots movement of Iranians fighting to assert control over their own country and its future.

David Houghton, in "Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis: A Cognitive Perspective," highlights the fears which encouraged these students to take radical action to assert Iran's independence from western power. Expounding upon the schema theory of psychology,

⁹⁷ Tabaar, "The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," 688-689.

⁹⁸ Kathleen Teltsch, "Bazargan Resignation Follows Long Internal Fight," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1979.

⁹⁹ Eric Rouleau, "Khomeini's Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, (n.p. Council on Foreign Relations, 1980), 12.

¹⁰⁰ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 155-156.

Houghton demonstrates that the mindset of these captors was set to Iran in 1953. As the events of 1953 had been seared into the minds of generations of Iranians, with their one attempt at a representative government destroyed by the Kermit Roosevelt's actions, these students were fearful that the Americans would again halt their quest for political freedom. The decisions they made were due in part to their belief that a scenario like the coup, which had placed the Shah into power, was likely to occur in the aftermath of the revolution. He argues that their framework of reference and the uncanny parallels between the Shah's departure in the days before the coup and his departure in 1979 in surrender to the revolution resulted in an insuppressible fear of American intervention¹⁰¹. Thus, by taking the US Embassy hostage, they were asserting their control over the country they deemed their oppressor. The United States had to aid in a coup attempt in 1979. Carter had a far different approach to foreign diplomacy than that of Eisenhower. While Eisenhower was content to make adjustments to foreign regimes, which he deemed necessary in the midst of the Cold War, the Cold War was dying out by the time of the Iranian Revolution. While the USSR was still a threat, the United States, led by Jimmy Carter, felt more comfortable in allowing self-determination in countries across the globe. Earlier theories of containment and the domino theory had led the United States into Vietnam and most Americans could agree they wanted to avoid repeating that mistake¹⁰². Likewise, Carter and Eisenhower were very different leaders. Carter saw himself as a transparent and honest leader and was suffering in the polls, whereas Eisenhower had been the military general of the European theater in World War II and was seen as a competent leader for most of his presidency. Military strategy was a far more comfortable decision for Eisenhower due to his experience and

¹⁰¹ Houghton, "Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis," 268.

¹⁰² Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 33-34.

he did not have to be as concerned about public backlash. The reality of United States' foreign policy decisions was not illuminated to Iranian citizens, as the United States still denied any participation in the coup of 1953. The radical anti-American sentiments within Iran, coupled with a concern that history was repeating itself offered an extreme fear in a second coup. As Mossadegh and Khomeini were seen as similar in their efforts to make great changes in the face of the unpopular Shah, many in Iran believed an American attack was imminent¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Houghton, "Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis, 270-272.

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDIES

2.1 Methodology

I aim to do a media analysis of the Iran Hostage Crisis, particularly portrayals of the United States and Iran, using three media outlets. These two newspapers, *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, and one television network, CBS News, will allow me to look at media depictions of both the first and final days of the hostage crisis. *The New York Times* is one of the most recognizable newspapers in the United States. Its first issue released in 1851, this paper has a long-established reputation as a premier news source. As New York City has been the largest metropolis in the United States for more than 200 years, *The New York Times* has focused upon more national news topics, offering a broader view on world events. Throughout the 20th century and into the present, *The New York Times* has been categorized as a more left leaning newspaper according to Boston University¹⁰⁴. As such, this newspaper source will be one of two news sources analyzed, the other being the more conservative leaning *Chicago Tribune*. *The New York Times* covered the Iranian Hostage Crisis from its first to last days and its techniques in reporting will be assessed for media coverage of the incident and portrayal of major characters and events throughout the crisis.

The *Chicago Tribune* is one of the top ten most circulated newspapers in the country and is the only Midwestern newspaper to hold that status. In fact, Chicago is the largest Midwestern

¹⁰⁴ "Media Bias," Boston University Library, accessed January 24, 2021, <https://library.bu.edu/c.php?g=617120&p=4452935>

city by far, allowing it to dominate representation of the breadbasket in news. The *Chicago Tribune* was established in 1847¹⁰⁵. As a highly circulated metropolitan paper, the *Chicago Tribune* covers local, national, and international events, offering a more conservative lens to the events of the world¹⁰⁶. *The New York Times* will offer a balancing perspective as a more left leaning news source. Throughout the 20th century, the *Chicago Tribune* was a well-established metropolitan news source. Therefore, journalists of this paper covered the Iran Hostage Crisis in great detail and the paper's representation of this event will prove illuminating.

CBS News was one of the three major national television networks in the 1970s¹⁰⁷. These three networks held very similar viewership statistics, with all holding very high viewership as television was the news media of choice in the 1970s and 1980s. CBS News housed the "most trusted man in America," Mr. Walter Cronkite, for much of the mid 20th century, including the period of the hostage crisis. Covering the most critical moments of history, from the assassination of President Kennedy to Apollo 11 landing on the moon, he captivated audiences with his representation of world news and his dedication to impartiality, "delivering the news straight and unvarnished"¹⁰⁸. Throughout the hostage crisis, he closed each broadcast by denoting the number of days that the hostages had been held captive in Tehran¹⁰⁹. The Iran Hostage Crisis offered a unique opportunity for network television, including CBS News, as it was able to capture images of Iranian anti-Americanism abroad and American dedication to the hostages at home. Walter Cronkite's career in journalism came to a close only six weeks after the

¹⁰⁵ "History," *Chicago Tribune*, accessed January 22, 2021 <https://www.chicagotribune.com/chi-companyhistory-htmlpage-htmlstory.html>

¹⁰⁶ "Media Bias," Boston University Library.

¹⁰⁷ Tom Shales, "TV in the '70s," *Washington Post*, December 27, 1979.

¹⁰⁸ Katie Couric, *CBS News*, July 17, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ James Larson, "Television and U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Iran Hostage Crisis," *Journal of Communication* 36, no. 4 (n.p. Anneberg School of Communications, 1986), 108.

Iran Hostage Crisis concluded, making it the last American experience narrated by his impartial voice. Cronkite was “a witness to history who also helped shape perceptions of it” and thus, his commentary will be illuminating¹¹⁰.

Throughout my analysis of the two cases studies of the Iran Hostage Crisis, the first days and final days of the crisis, I will be adopting the media analysis framework executed by Ralph E. Dowling in “Print Journalism as Political Communication: The Iran Hostage Crisis”¹¹¹. Dowling uses the work of Ernest Bormann, an American communication theorist, who analyzes news media. Bormann’s theory of symbolic convergence explains how shared narratives, like those created by the media, build and sustain group consciousness. He argues that the narratives put forth by people are innately biased, representing characters within them in a way which promulgates a particular characterization. Dowling takes this a step further, pointing out that news media has the ability to create even more powerful characterizations, as it has a large audience to which it can relay its biased narrative. This theory allows for greater insight into the reasons why certain portrayals are executed in the way they are by journalists. Exemplifying this, Dowling uses the method by which Bormann analyzes biased narratives, termed the fantasy-theme method of rhetorical criticism, applying it to the Iranian Hostage Crisis. The fantasy-theme method is predicated upon the belief that each group creates its own social reality in communication. There is not one all-encompassing reality which media outlets report upon. Instead, the media establishes the true social reality by the ways in which it reports upon the facts at hand. In order to identify the social reality which has been created by the media, one must analyze the themes present in the communications released. The qualities necessary to create a

¹¹⁰ Valerie J. Nelson, “Walter Cronkite dies at 92; longtime CBS anchorman,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 2009.

¹¹¹ R.E. Dowling, “Print Journalism as Political Communication: The Iran Hostage Crisis,” *Political Communication and Persuasion* 6, (London: Taylor and French, 1989), 131.

narrative, those of character, setting, and action, each carry alongside them these themes. Such themes are vital to narrative, as they embody the values which define this shared reality created by the media¹¹². As one uses this theory to identify and assess prevailing narratives, one is able to better understand the larger socially constructed reality and the values behind it. Upon identification of these fantasies and the themes within, one can better understand the values of the group which created them and those of the community they serve¹¹³. As I use this theory to delve into the critical moments of the hostage crisis, I will identify the themes which guide the media narrative between Iran and the United States. I aim to demonstrate that the actual events of the crisis are just one facet of the conflicting relationship between these two states, thereby helping inform historical analysis of events.

As the Iran Hostage Crisis was covered extensively by American news outlets and yet was mostly taking place on the other side of the world, the media had extensive control of the immediate narrative and influenced the subsequent long term national interpretation of events. This crisis, in which 66 Americans were taken hostage, was the first significant encounter most Americans had with the state of Iran. As the power dynamic between Iran and the United States was skewed, the news media viewed Iran as an area of little importance and did not cover the country extensively. Thus, most average Americans knew very little of the history of Iran and their government's controversial actions within it. This contrasted greatly with the average Iranian's knowledge of the United States, as the American presence in Iran had changed the trajectory of their political system. While the United States government had maintained a stable relationship with Reza Shah since the coup of '53 under Eisenhower, the low priority of this

¹¹² Dowling, "Print Journalism as Political Communication, 129-130.

¹¹³ Dowling, "Print Journalism as Political Communication, 130.

alliance from the perspective of news media allowed Iran to receive little coverage and remain a mystery to most Americans. The embassy's seizure and the media's ability to capture images of blindfolded and bound American hostages and Iranian protesters crying "Death to America," caused the American public to become aware quickly. This sudden cognizance was due in large measure to the media's coverage of these events. I argue that the media moderated the first substantive encounter between the average American and Iran. As such, I argue that the media played a pivotal role in the narrative which grew out of the hostage crisis. Thus, fantasy theme analysis will allow for a more critical and in-depth assessment of this narrative and personified characters, settings, and actions it established for American viewers.

2.2 Case Study: First Days of Hostage Crisis (November 4-6, 1979)

2.2.1. Background: The Hostage Crisis

On November 4, 1979 around 12:00 pm, the American Embassy in Tehran was overtaken by a group Iranian students who later identified themselves as "The Muslim Students Following the Imam's Line"¹¹⁴. Varying accounts reported between 300 and 500 students flooding the gate of the embassy. They faced little response from the 14 marines tasked with defending the embassy, as the military protection for the embassy had been instructed to refrain from firing upon the intruders¹¹⁵. The students overtook the compound, taking its 66 occupants hostage¹¹⁶. This was not the first time the embassy in Tehran had been taken hostage. Earlier that year, on February 14th, a group of protesters overtook the embassy and kept its occupants hostage for

¹¹⁴ Tabaar, "Causes of the US Hostage Crisis in Iran, 688.

¹¹⁵ Patricia Palmerton, "The Rhetoric of Terrorism and Media Response to the 'Crisis in Iran,' " *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 52 (Spring 1988), 108.

¹¹⁶ Tabaar, "Causes of the US Hostage Crisis in Iran," 688.

three hours. During this earlier crisis, the Iranian government swiftly coordinated for the end of the hostage situation and tensions between the two countries calmed slightly¹¹⁷. Unfortunately, anti-American rhetoric had been amplified since the first embassy takeover. As such, the Iranian government's willingness to come to the aid of the Americans had deteriorated. Additionally, while the nationalist leadership was technically in power, Khomeini had continued to gain support and at this point held more credence than Bazargan. Khomeini's endorsement of this seizure would encourage the students to remain in the embassy. The drastic measure by the Iranian students forced numerous State Department officials to be awoken at 3:45am Eastern Standard Time, as this was the time of the crisis in the United States capital. Carter and his cabinet were kept apprised the situation as the State Department established a task force for the Crisis in Iran and began to work to return the hostages safely¹¹⁸.

In the first days of the hostage crisis, President Carter was afforded a large boost in approval ratings, jumping 26 points and reaching 58% approval¹¹⁹. This was due in large part to the rally phenomenon, where a state's leader is afforded more support from citizens as a result of the outpour of patriotic support during a national crisis¹²⁰. This support of President Carter did not last. As the hostage crisis continued without resolution, with newscasters inundating the American people with the latest updates from Tehran and interviewing the hostages' families, faith in President Carter's ability to fix this crisis waned. By June 13, 1980, some seven months

¹¹⁷ Patricia Palmerton, "The Rhetoric of Terrorism," 108.

¹¹⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, "Government in Iran Vows Help in Siege: US is Uncertain Despite Promise by Tehran to 'Do its Best'," *New York Times*, November 5, 1979.

¹¹⁹ Karen J Callaghan and Simo Virtanen, "Revised Models of the 'Rally Phenomenon': The Case of the Carter Presidency," *The Journal of Politics* 55, no. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 756.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 757.

since the hostage crisis began, Carter's approval rating was again at 32%¹²¹. The American people were less optimistic in his ability to bring the hostages home.

2.2.2. Media Analysis

Both *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* had been sent to print and therefore did not cover the hostage situation on November 4th, as the events unfolded in Tehran. Thus, the first reports by these papers on the seizure of the American embassy was Monday, November 5th.¹²² Three articles appeared in *The New York Times* and six articles were published in the *Chicago Tribune*. In *The New York Times*, Reuters' "Tehran Students Seize U.S. Embassy and Hold Hostages" was placed above the fold on the front page, Bernard Gwertzman's "Government in Iran Vows Help in Siege" was located in a column on the first page as well, and "Iranians in Protest at Liberty Statue" by Robert D. McFadden was placed on page A11.¹²³ Similarly, "U.S. Embassy in Iran seized; staff is held," ran across the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*, with three articles written by the Tribune Wire services outlining the events, John Maclean's "It's all your fault, Iran envoy says," a personal story, "Chicago woman's kin among hostages in Iran" by Lynn Emmerman, and an editorial entitled "Iran Ungoverned." These articles in both papers addressed various aspects of the early moments of the hostage crisis, including details of the events themselves, descriptions of Iranian anti-American sentiment, governmental responses, and protests in the United States.

CBS News offered a small update regarding the hostage situation on Sunday November 4th. Ed Bradley of CBS's Sunday Night News detailed the events which had occurred in Tehran earlier that day with images of the student captors and interviews with Iranian leadership

¹²¹ Presidential Job Approval, *American Presidency Project*.

¹²² *The New York Times*, November 5, 1979.

¹²³ *The New York Times*, November 5, 1979.

interwoven throughout¹²⁴. CBS News spent significantly less time on the event than it would in the coming days. This may have been because this same story had been broadcast across the country some months prior and had ended with little fuss. To close out the segment November 4th, Diane Sawyer commented upon the parallel stories in Iran-US relations, saying, “this is the second time in a year the Iranians have taken over the US embassy in Tehran, which is forcing State Department officials to wonder even if this incident is peacefully resolved, what about the next¹²⁵ ?” Reiterating the connection between these two events in Iran, viewers were encouraged to attribute the quick resolution of the previous incident with that of the present.

The first theme which must be assessed within fantasy theme analysis is that of the characters in the event being studied. When using the theory put forth by Bormann, the narratives which are told in this case by the news media are stories. As with most all stories, they have main and supporting characters. These characters may be analyzed for their actions and the ways in which the narrator chooses to portray them. In the early days of the Iran Hostage Crisis, the two main characters were the United States and Iran. The United States’ characters, including Carter, Secretary of State Vance, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, State department officials, and the hostages, were largely inactive and at most reactive. As *The New York Times* described Carter and Vance getting updated on the events at the embassy from Camp David and a State Department task force being established, the United States was clearly reacting the actions of the Iranian students who overtook the embassy¹²⁶. These characters were then tasked with preparations and anticipating the Iranians’ next move. In Gwertzman’s “Government in Iran Vows Help in Siege,” the journalist explains the United States issued a response of

¹²⁴ Sunday Night News with Ed Bradley, *CBS News*, November 4, 1979.

¹²⁵ Sunday Night News with Ed Bradley, *CBS News*, November 4, 1979.

¹²⁶ Gwertzman, “Government in Iran Vows Help in Siege,” *New York Times*.

encouragement to the Iranian government to end the situation swiftly. This statement released by the US government, asserting that American leadership was confident in Iran's ability to end the crisis, was unusual¹²⁷. The United States sought to encourage Iranian leadership under Bazargan and bolster its confidence to deal with the situation quickly, avoiding internal conflict with Khomeini. Typically, "When an incident of this kind takes place, the host government is usually held responsible for embassy security and a protest is made. But because the Carter Administration recognizes the fragile influence of the Bazargan Government, it chose to offer encouragement rather than berate it for the incident"¹²⁸. As *The New York Times* reflects, Carter is portrayed as an anticipatory leader, one who does not lead by force, but by forethought. The *Chicago Tribune* echoed many of the same character themes of the United States, with the exception of highlighting a family member of a hostage who lived locally. This article in particular personalized the events unfolding on the other side of the world, humanizing it in a way which was not present in *The New York Times*. A sister of a hostage, Sally Smith, pleaded, "Now, all I can think of is that I don't want my brother to die." This emotional moment captured the events in a way that allowed Americans to perceive the event as impacting the life of a fellow citizen and neighbor¹²⁹. CBS reported on the hostage situation similarly as well, illustrating the United States as both the victim of illegitimate actions and the leader who seek to resolve the conflict. Contrasting comments about the marine guards at the embassy who were ordered to avoid violence and the blindfolded and handcuffed hostages who were "paraded in front of the embassy," Americans are portrayed as a civilized and abused people in Iran. Hoping to secure

¹²⁷ Gwertzman, "Government in Iran Vows Help in Siege," *New York Times*.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Lynn Emmerman, "Chicago woman's kin among hostages in Iran," *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 1979.

the hostages diplomatically, the United States is shown to be in the right against the alternative character of Iran.

The character of Iran is described as the antithesis of the United States character. However, the character of Iran is more complex, as there are groups in conflict, warring for control of the state. While this was also true in the United States, as 1980 was an election year, the groups warring for control were doing so within the confines of the structures put in place by the government. Alternatively, Iran is still dealing with the repercussions of its revolution. People had been silenced for generations and are just now able to put structures in place to formulate a running government. Khomeini held the support of the Iranian people, but many smaller political factions believed there was enough instability to lay siege to the newly formed Iranian state. The current leadership under Prime Minister Bazargan is described by *The New York Times* as disunified from the religious majority led by “spiritual leader and de facto head of state” Ayatollah Khomeini¹³⁰. This lack of representation of the majority caused great disorder and conflict, including the Iranian Hostage Crisis.¹³¹ While Bazargan met with National Security Advisor Brzezinski in the days before the incident, demonstrating his willingness for some degree of relations with the United States, the students who seized the embassy demanded that Iran halt all relations with the United States¹³². Bazargan’s association with the United States signaled his disconnect from the growing anti-American movement in Iran. The seizure action was quickly endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini and further cemented the divide between these two political groups¹³³. The *Chicago Tribune*’s editorial, “Iran Ungoverned,” referred to Iran’s post-

¹³⁰ Gwertzman, “Government in Iran Vows Help in Siege,” *New York Times*.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Sunday Night News with Ed Bradley, *CBS News*, November 4, 1979.

¹³³ Ibid.

revolutionary government as “helpless titleholders who call themselves the government” and the religious sect as “the reactionary cabal of religious extremists headed by Ayatollah Khomeini”¹³⁴. With neither fit to lead and supported by the larger Iranian public, the depiction of the character of Iran was haphazard at best. The lack of a clear hierarchy of power within Iran, coupled with the average American’s lack of knowledge regarding the state of Iran and its tumultuous relationship with the United States allowed for a vague and illusive character of Iran. An application Edward Said’s theory orientalism – where western countries portray the peoples of the Middle East as a strange and elusive “other,” in order to solidify their own identity in opposition to this group – is applicable in the early hours of the crisis¹³⁵. This post-revolutionary “other” of Iran was seen as radical in action and religion, far from American daily life. Throughout *The New York Times* articles, the students who overtook the embassy, as well as those who protested in New York City, were referred to primarily as “Moslim students”¹³⁶. This label, identifying them with their religion, spelling the term incorrectly, demonstrates the lack of familiarity the journalists had with Middle Eastern culture. Titling them as such isolated them from the large majority of American citizens, removing them from the scope of commonality and labeling them as a distant “other” in comparison to the character of the United States.

The second theme to be studied in the fantasy-theme method of rhetorical criticism is that of setting. In the first days of the hostage crisis, the setting was primarily in Tehran, as this is where the immediate action was taking place. The embassy was taken over, the Iranians were protesting, demanding that the Shah be returned from the United States where he was receiving cancer treatment to stand trial, and the Iranian government was posturing a defense for the

¹³⁴ “Iran Ungoverned,” Editorials, *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 1979.

¹³⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (n.p. Pantheon Books, 1978) 36.

¹³⁶ Reuters, “Teheran Students Seize U.S. Embassy and Hold Hostages,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1979.

students. As scenes of the captors burning flags and parading blindfolded hostages were narrated by CBS's Ed Bradley, the locale of Iran became connotated as the alternative to the American way of life and its values. The radical images captured by the media isolated this incident as something that would never happen in the United States, but still endangered its citizens. The revolutionary spirit of Iran, as well as its continued widespread protests covered by the American media, established a setting theme that was far from the norm in the United States, evoking the orientalist "other" and solidifying Americans as members of the "normal" society. Portrayed as a locale of violence and a breeding ground of unrest, Iran was seen as unstable and not to be trusted by American media consumers. Images plastered across the back of the *Chicago Tribune* demonstrated the radical repercussions of the crisis of Iran (Figure 1). These protests also spread into the United States, yet these events juxtaposed greatly with the events in Tehran as they were far more peaceful and democratic. Thus, the setting of the United States was shown as the opposite of Iran. Following protocol, notifying branches of government, and carrying on with the tasks at hand, the United States was illustrated as calm and collected in the midst of this national trial. Upon hearing news of the crisis, Carter remained at Camp David, keeping his schedule while being updated as the crisis continued¹³⁷. Iranians were allowed to protest in front of the hospital in which the Shah of Iran was being treated, advocating for his return to Iran to stand trial¹³⁸. Even when other Iranians chained themselves to the Statue of Liberty, demanding the extradition of the Shah to Iran, the monument was simply closed for the day and the protesters removed, illustrating American law and order and the state's ease of control over its citizens¹³⁹.

¹³⁷ Gwertzman, "Government in Iran Vows Help in Siege," *New York Times*.

¹³⁸ Robert D. McFadden, "Iranians in Protest at Liberty Statue: Students Hang Banner Demanding Shah Be 'Tried and Punished,' " *New York Times*, November 5, 1979.

¹³⁹ McFadden, "Iranians in Protest at Liberty Statue" *New York Times*.

While the act of the seizure of the embassy may have demonstrated differences in cultural perspectives between Iran and the United States, the resolution of the other episode represented the stability in the setting of the United States.



Hostages stand blindfolded inside the American Embassy compound in Tehran after the diplomatic outpost was seized Sunday by militants to force the U. S. to extradite the shah.

Iranians confront U.S.



On the second day of the seizure, undertaken in the name of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, his only son Ahmad, 46, appeared wearing robes with upraised arm on the wall of the embassy to address the student militants responsible. Within the compound (right), a student basked himself painting a slogan on a roof, while others lettered anti-American banners near several parked cars. A portrait of the Ayatollah was raised near the gate, patrolled by armed police and Islamic revolutionary guards.

UPI telephotos



7 invaders charged

As word flashed Sunday of the takeover in Iran, a band of seven Iranian students invaded the Statue of Liberty on New York City's Liberty Island, occupying it for more than four hours. They draped a banner from the statue's head reading "Shah must be tried and punished," then handcuffed themselves to the crown. Police eventually cut them loose and they were charged Monday with trespassing, disorderly conduct, defacing property and assembling without a permit. Four of the students, Mohsen Badaksh, Hamid Khashgoffar-Ghazanfar, Masoum Masoud and Farzin Rezai, are from Chicago.

Figure 1 Chicago Tribune, November 6, 1979

Finally, action themes are the third to be analyzed using the fantasy-theme method of rhetorical criticism. On the first day, there were limited actions executed by the United States and Iran. The Iranian students overtook the embassy, taking 66 Americans hostage. As the group of students who committed this act was so large as to overwhelm the gate and easily take control of the embassy, this action was a mass protest, an act endorsed by many¹⁴⁰. The anger of Iranians towards Americans was clearly a wide spread issue if this group of students was able to maintain the support of its citizens in the wake of such radical action. Future plans of the Iranian students were vague, as demands for the release of the Shah were unlikely to be fulfilled. The hostage takers were unsure of their future actions if these demands were not met, claiming they would respond to what their people wanted¹⁴¹. Thus, using Bormann's fantasy theme analysis, as the state whose embassy was seized, the United States was the victim, humiliated, as it was not able to stave off the illegitimate actions of a less economically and democratically evolved country. Following this action of aggression, demonstrations of support for those who had overtaken the embassy were performed in both Iran and the United States. Images of Khomeini, support for the hostage takers' demands, and even more radical action, such as hanging banners off of the crown of the Statue of Liberty, all showed Iranian support for the acts of the students¹⁴². The Statue of Liberty is an iconic monument of the United States, frequently highlighted as an artistic display of the state's commitment to its principles of freedom and justice. It is also frequently used by protestors as a site upon which to express their frustration for the times the United States has fallen short of these values. By using the Statue of Liberty to demand to return the Shah to Iran, these protestors were both challenging the actuality of these American ideals, as well as

¹⁴⁰ Patricia Palmerton, "The Rhetoric of Terrorism," 108.

¹⁴¹ Tribune Wire Services, "U.S. embassy in Iran seized, scores are held," *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 1979.

¹⁴² McFadden, "Iranians in Protest at Liberty Statue" *New York Times*.

demonstrating their disregard for American culture. US citizens laying witness to the difficulties of their fellow citizens across the world were also able to see these conflicts and Iranian discontent on their own shores, making it far easier to isolate them as the enemy.

2.3 Crisis as Status Quo: November 7, 1979 – January 18, 1981)

2.3.1 Carter and Hostage Crisis

After the first days of the hostage crisis, American leadership realized this issue would not be solved swiftly. The United States hoped to negotiate a peaceful end to the crisis, with the Carter administration, led by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, working to advance discussions with Iranian leadership. They opened negotiations with Khomeini after he was identified as the leader of Iran in early December 1979, as well as President Bani-Sadr, hoping they would be able to put an end to this international fiasco. The United States had good reason for optimism, as conversations held with Khomeini while he was in exile in Paris had assured the United States of the religious leader's commitment to maintaining economic relations¹⁴³. Mohammad Taabar argues Khomeini did not change his rhetoric and begin to denounce the United States until broad sentiment in Iran turned against any relationship with the United States as the political environment radicalized in the wake of the seizure. Both United States and Iranian leadership strove to keep negotiations under wraps in the hopes of achieving a mutually beneficial agreement. Domestically, the crisis was such a "hot topic" within both countries; any perceived appeasement of the other nation would have been detrimental to the success of negotiations¹⁴⁴. However, by early April 1980, negotiations for the

¹⁴³ Tabaar, "The Untold Account of the Communist Threat," 672

¹⁴⁴ Banks, "The Diplomatic Presentation of The State," 1169-1170.

release of the hostages had failed¹⁴⁵. Khomeini backed away from discussions as popular support turned towards more fervent anti-western and Anti-American rhetoric. Khomeini had learned from his revolutionary predecessors that one had to follow public sentiment in order to maintain power within Iran. Bazargan failed to maintain public sentiment and was removed from office¹⁴⁶. In the 1953 rise of the National Front, Mossadegh and his two predecessors struggled to maintain the support of the rapidly changing political sphere.¹⁴⁷ If Khomeini wanted to maintain leadership, he would likely have to wait to end the stalemate with the United States.

Fearing that negotiations would fall through, Carter had prepared a second plan to ensure the safety of the hostages throughout the negotiations process in early 1980. For months the Delta Force, a special operations force of the United States Army, had been getting ready for a hostage rescue mission. As the crisis was well publicized within Iran, the United States government knew where the hostages were located within the compound. This knowledge made a rescue attempt feasible according to military assessments, but likely with Iranian and American casualties. The original 66 hostages had been limited to 52 after the women and African Americans were released by Khomeini because he asserted they “were not American spies”¹⁴⁸. Khomeini made this choice to highlight the lack of opportunities afforded to these groups within the United States and thus the hypocritical nature of the United States chastisement of Iran. The Carter Administration had weighed the danger and decided that it was worth the risk.¹⁴⁹ Rose McDermott analyzes Carter’s rescue attempt decision in “Prospect Theory in International

¹⁴⁵ Banks, “The Diplomatic Presentation of The State,” 1171

¹⁴⁶ Teltsch, “Bazargan Resignation Follows Long International Fight,” *The New York Times*.

¹⁴⁷ Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, 35.

¹⁴⁸ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*.

¹⁴⁹ Rose McDermott, “Prospect Theory in International Relations: The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission” *Political Psychology* 13, no. 2 (1992), 243-244.

Relations: The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission.” She applies the prospect theory, where people “tend to be risk-seeking in the domain of losses and risk-averse in the domain of gains” ¹⁵⁰, to explain Carter’s decision-making after negotiations fell through in early April. Carter was more willing to take risks to ensure the safety of the hostages and demonstrate that the United States would not accept this behavior from Iran. As this was an election year, this too played a role. Carter wanted a swift ending to the crisis to demonstrate his competence in foreign affairs. While there were other options on the table, including doing nothing, implementing sanctions, mining the harbors outside of Iran, and implementing a military strike, the hostage rescue mission met the most risk President Carter was willing to take¹⁵¹. He did not want to enter war with Iran, writing in his memoir, *Keeping Faith*, “I wanted [...] to prevent the spilling of blood on both sides, but it would be inevitable if the hostages were harmed. I was restrained from a preemptive military strike by the realization that the Iranian fanatics would almost certainly kill the hostage in response” ¹⁵². As Iran continued to make threats to harm the hostages, Carter believed that the United States had to act and could no longer “depend on diplomacy” ¹⁵³. In order to maintain the international reputation of the United States and maintain the safety of its citizens, they could not sit back and wait any longer.

Secretary of State Vance attempted to deter President Carter from this action, believing that the Iranians would not harm the American hostages and would return them when there was nothing more to gain politically. While Carter respected Vance and had formed a strong relationship with him in the first years of his presidency, Carter chose to go against this advice.

¹⁵⁰ McDermott, “Prospect Theory in International Relations,” 238.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 242.

¹⁵² Jimmy Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 459.

¹⁵³ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 506.

Carter attempted to change Vance's mind, but to no avail¹⁵⁴. Vance was not invited to the final meetings in regards to the rescue mission and submitted his resignation in the days after receiving the news¹⁵⁵. President Carter felt that the United States needed to demonstrate its commitment to its people and American military superiority and as such, was in favor of a rescue attempt. He gave his endorsement of the rescue, saying "it was time for us to bring our hostages home; their safety and our national honor were at stake," while speaking with his top advisors¹⁵⁶. Brzezinski also encouraged him towards this decision, as he felt that the costs for remaining at the will of the Iranians was far too great¹⁵⁷.

In April of 1980, five months after the Iranian students seized the embassy, the plan was put into action. Operation Eagle Claw, the code name of the operation, began with eight American military helicopters moved to the final fueling station before the rescue attempt. The plan was stopped short however, as three of the helicopters were unable to continue the trek due to mechanical issues. Charles Beckwith, the man who led the mission, believed that the hostage rescue mission could not be completed with only five helicopters. After hearing this assessment, President Carter cancelled the rescue mission¹⁵⁸. Just seconds later, a helicopter collided with a fueling aircraft, exploding and killing eight service men. As the bright light and noise from the explosion caught the attention of Iran, the Americans had to flee, leaving the wreckage and dead military members behind¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁴ Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 507.

¹⁵⁵ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 171-172

¹⁵⁶ Carter, *Keeping the Faith*, 507.

¹⁵⁷ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 171.

¹⁵⁸ McDermott, "Prospect Theory in International Relations," 260.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 260.

This failed mission then had to be addressed by President Carter. The White House put out a press release early in the morning on April 25, 1980, stating that a rescue attempt had failed earlier that day in Iran. Later that day, President Carter spoke on national television, detailing specific mechanical issues that prevented the success of the rescue attempt and the lives lost in the process. He took full responsibility for the decision to go forward with the mission and its resulting failure:

I made the decision to set our long-developed plans into operation. I ordered this rescue mission prepared in order to safeguard American lives, to protect America's national interests, and to reduce the tensions in the world that have been caused among many nations as this crisis has continued. It was my decision to attempt the rescue operation. It was my decision to cancel it when problems developed in the placement of our rescue team for a future rescue operation. The responsibility is fully my own¹⁶⁰.

While the recognition of his own fault was commendable, this most recent failure of the Carter administration to resolve this crisis discredited him in the eyes of Americans. A Harris Survey completed by ABC News in the wake of the failed hostage rescue attempt found that of the 793 voters polled, 70% believed it was right to have tried the rescue attempt, but 56% gave Carter low markings on his handling of the rescue¹⁶¹. The discovery of an attempted hostage rescue mission also further deteriorated relations with Iran, resulting in the hostages being moved, placed in locations all over Tehran to inhibit future US military rescue attempts¹⁶².

¹⁶⁰ President Jimmy Carter, Statement on the Iran Rescue Mission, *The Miller Center at the University of Virginia*, April 25, 1980, accessed January 25, 2021, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-25-1980-statement-iran-rescue-mission>.

¹⁶¹ Harris Survey, *ABC News*, April 28, 1980, Vol II No. 52, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://theharrispoll.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Harris-Interactive-Poll-Research-HOSTAGE-RESCUE-ATTEMPT-SUPPORTED-CARTER-RATED-NEGATIVELY-1980-04.pdf>.

¹⁶² Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 175.

2.3.2 Election and Hostage Crisis

Only a few months after the hostage crisis began, President Carter began to run for reelection. Ted Kennedy ran against Carter in attempt to oust him as the Democratic nominee. The black sheep of the Kennedy family, Ted Kennedy had tarnished his reputation in 1969 in the incident known as “Chappaquiddick.” He recklessly spun off the road on Chappaquiddick Island in Massachusetts, killing the 28-year-old passenger in his car, Mary Jo Kopechne. This incident caught national attention, permanently marring his reputation¹⁶³. Ted Kennedy’s candidacy demonstrated the lack of support President Carter had even within his own party, as Kennedy, a political pariah, believed he had a chance to oust a sitting president. While President Carter proved victorious in the primary, the campaign against the Republican Party candidate Ronald Reagan would be far more difficult and strenuous.

Reagan tapped into the American people’s distrust in national politics and their disappointment in the current presidency’s domestic and foreign policy¹⁶⁴. He simultaneously rejected the current American political sphere and celebrated American values of freedom and liberty, challenging Carter’s leadership abilities and celebrating the history of American democracy and world leadership. As he refocused Americans on the foundational aspects of the United States and the opportunity it had to take back the banner of world superpower, Reagan captured the attention of many voters. While President Carter’s recent track record showed him struggling to handle a small dictatorial state, Reagan’s impassioned speeches and idealized view of the United States allowed him to gain widespread support¹⁶⁵. Reagan capitalized on the Iran

¹⁶³ Sarah Wu, Chappaquiddick: A History Lesson 50 years Later, *The Boston Globe*, July 17, 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Chester Pach, “ ‘Top Gun’, Toughness, and Terrorism: Some Reflections on the Elections of 1980 and 2004,” *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 555.

¹⁶⁵ Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 176.

Hostage Crisis as a representation of how far America had fallen. As he debated with Carter October 28, 1980, he reflected on the hostage crisis as an area to study to prevent future missteps, saying “What I do think should be done... — and we’ve endured this humiliation for just lacking 1 week of a year now — then, I think, it is time for us to have a complete investigation as to the diplomatic efforts that were made in the beginning, why they have been there so long”¹⁶⁶. The United States’ identity as leader of the free world was threatened by this “humiliation” in Reagan’s view, as it was unable to handle this crisis in a timely fashion. Closing out his bid for election the night of November 3, 1980, Reagan opened with concern for the hostages and hopes for their safe return, however, he also highlighted that the infatuation with this crisis would soon be over and new foreign and domestic objectives would take their place. The most important item voters needed to consider when choosing their next president was preserving the American nation and its ideals, the “city on a hill.” This image, derived from Protestant theology encouraging the spreading of the gospel, has also been used to encapsulate America as a beacon of democracy and liberty throughout the state’s 200 year history.

At this very moment, some young American, coming up along the Virginia or Maryland shores of the Potomac is seeing for the first time the lights that glow on the great halls of our government and the monuments to the memory of our great men. Let us resolve tonight that young Americans will always see those Potomac lights; that they will always find there a city of hope in a country that is free. And let us resolve they will say of our day and our generation that we did keep faith with our God, that we did act worthy of ourselves; that we did protect and pass on lovingly that shining city on a hill¹⁶⁷.

This idealized vision for America’s future offered hope to Americans who were frustrated with the Carter Presidency’s lack of success economically and his inability to bring the 52 hostages

¹⁶⁶ Debate with Ronald Reagan, *University of Virginia Miller Center*, October 28, 1980, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/october-28-1980-debate-ronald-reagan>

¹⁶⁷ Election Eve Address ‘A Vision for America,’ November 3, 1980, *Ronald Reagan Library*, accessed December 3, 2020, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/election-eve-address-vision-america>

home. On election night, November 4, 1980, Ronald Reagan won 489 votes in the electoral college, leaving Carter to win only five states in addition to Washington D.C.¹⁶⁸. After many promises by both candidates to bring the hostages home and end the humiliating episode, both were able to make good on their promises January 20, 1981. Carter negotiated with Iran in the last hours of his presidency and the hostages were finally released just minutes after Reagan's inauguration¹⁶⁹. While both were relieved to finally close out this chapter of American crises, the late return of the hostages prevented the political victory to be awarded to Carter for his diplomacy. Carter moved out of the White House and President Reagan welcomed the hostages home later that week.

2.4 Case Study: Hostages Returned (January 19-20, 1981)

2.4.1 Background: Negotiations

In the first month of 1981, the United States faced much change. President Jimmy Carter had lost his reelection bid. Republican Ronald Reagan was to be inaugurated January 20th and with it, the American public ushered into a new era of conservative policies. For Reaganites, his election caused a cascading effect in American domestic and foreign policy, ending the Cold War and eventually improving the American economy which had struggled for much of the 1970s¹⁷⁰. Additionally, the Iran Hostage Crisis, which had consumed the attention of the American public and had been a nightly news special for over a year, was coming to an end. By mid-January, it became apparent that negotiations to bring the hostages home were coming to a

¹⁶⁸ 1980 Electoral College Results, *National Archives*, December 16, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Cronkite, *CBS News*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁷⁰ "The Second American Revolution: Reaganomics," Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, accessed January 24, 2021. <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/the-presidency/economic-policy/>

close, mostly due to President Carter's desire to end the situation before the end of his tenure¹⁷¹. On January 19th, it was announced that a deal had been made between Iran and the United States through their intermediary Algeria¹⁷². President Carter phoned the hostages' families to inform them of their loved ones' imminent return and publicly asserted, "We have reached an agreement with Iran which will result, I believe, in the freedom of our American hostages"¹⁷³. This confidence was short-lived, however, as a hitch in communication regarding the agreement and its appendix allowed for the hostages to remain in Tehran for another day¹⁷⁴.

After the failed hostage rescue attempt, relations between the United States and Iran were maintained their strained nature. With another rescue attempt ruled unlikely to succeed, and Iran interested in removing itself from the international spotlight, both countries were forced to come to the negotiations table and work towards a mutually beneficial conclusion. The diplomatic course proved very difficult, as it took over eight months and the help of an intermediary, Algeria, to reach a final agreement which was acceptable to both parties¹⁷⁵. In late January 1981, days before Reagan's inauguration, the United States announced that an agreement had been reached and the deal would be signed shortly¹⁷⁶. Joseph B. Treaster of *The New York Times* captured the mentality of the hostages' loved ones, quoting Mrs. Morefield who said, "It's vitally important to my own well-being that when this is over I can say I got through it without falling apart. It's my own way of fighting"¹⁷⁷. The deal around which American excitement followed

¹⁷¹ Lesley Stahl, *CBS News*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁷² Joseph B. Treaster, "Near-Euphoria of Hostages' Families Gives Way to Last-Minute Uncertainty, *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁷³ "Carter's Statement on Iran Pact," *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁷⁴ James Yuenger, "Algerian jets wait in Tehran," *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁷⁵ Text of Agreement Between Iran and the U.S. to Resolve the Hostage Situation, *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁷⁶ Treaster, "Near-Euphoria of Hostages' Families."

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

allowed for the frozen assets of Iranian citizens held in American banks to be moved back into Iran's possession. These assets had been frozen in retribution for the seizure of the embassy and offered a way to draw Iran to the negotiation table. The Bank of England would accept the deposits made by the United States, swiftly turning the money over to the Iranians. The deal also opened negotiations regarding the late Shah's assets between the United States and Iran, however, the hostages' return was not contingent upon the success of these negotiations¹⁷⁸. Once the monies were moved, the hostages would be loaded onto an Algerian plane and flown into Western Germany to receive medical treatment. The following week, they would return home to the United States. While this agreement did come to pass, miscommunications between the United States and Iran in regards to an appendix of the deal caused Iran to halt the deal for a period of hours¹⁷⁹. This momentary halt prevented President Carter from meeting the hostages before attending Reagan's inauguration.¹⁸⁰ Expecting to report upon the hostages release, CBS News, *The New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* all instead covered the negotiations' flaw and the anticipation for the hostages' arrival on January 20th. *The New York Times* ran "US and Iran Agree to Compromise on Funds After Dispute Delays Release of Hostages" and the *Chicago Tribune* stated "Iran charges hostage pact 'subterfuge,' delays deal." These headlines echoed the narrative of the US media in regards to the hostage crisis and the end of Carter's presidency. Even the conclusion to this foreign diplomatic disaster could not go smoothly.

2.4.2 Media Analysis

The characters of the end of the Iran Hostage Crisis were the same as those at the beginning of the crisis. United States' characters consisted of the hostages, President Carter and his

¹⁷⁸ Text of Agreement, *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁷⁹ Yuenger, "Algerian jets," *Chicago Tribune*.

¹⁸⁰ Walter Cronkite, *CBS News*, January 20, 1981.

administration, the hostages' families, and the larger American public. Carter and the leadership surrounding him had faltered by this point, no longer seen as heroes but as those who had further embarrassed the American reputation. Alternatively, the hostages and their families were maintained as an object of heroism and bravery, a symbol of American endurance. Again, Iran and the United States' characters are portrayed at odds by the media, Iran represented as the "other" to the familiar American character. As the media outlets of CBS News, *The New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* are consumed largely by an American audience, these media consumers saw themselves as a part of the American character group, the lead character against the antagonistic Iran. In the final days, America is shown to be exhausted by the prolonged events of the hostage crisis and the negotiations to end the issue. Walter Cronkite highlighted the 443rd day of the crisis, emphasizing the longevity of the issue and its continuation even in the face of the end of negotiations.¹⁸¹ *The New York Times* published stories highlighting Carter's sleepless night as he worked tirelessly to conclude the hostage event, asserting "the day was a test of his physical endurance as well as his patience."¹⁸² This quote demonstrates the physical toll of the crisis upon Carter, also echoed in the American character. Similarly, the *Chicago Tribune* capitalized upon local exhaustion and frustration. "Hope and Frustration: Another Day of Waiting," ran on the front page of this midwestern paper, alongside a photograph of Eleanor Kupke, a loved one of a hostage, ringing her hands with pursed lips (Figure 2)¹⁸³. As this crisis drew to a close amidst fears of false hope and failed negotiations, the American people were reluctant to celebrate until the hostages were on American soil.

¹⁸¹ Walter Cronkite, *CBS News*, January 19, 1981.

¹⁸² Terence Smith, "Carter is Thwarted in Wish to Welcome 52 as President," *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁸³ "Hope, Frustration: Another Day of Waiting," *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 1981.

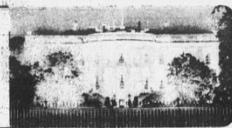
BIRTHDAY BINGO

\$57,000 in cash prizes, Page 6



The ins and outs of social Washington

In Tempo, Section 2



Chicago Tribune

Tuesday, January 20, 1981

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4 Sections 25

Iran charges hostage pact 'subterfuge,' delays deal

Full hostage coverage:

- Profiles of the 52 American hostages are on page 2.
- Everyone in Homer, Ill., figured the celebration would have been in full swing by now, but it didn't work out that way. Page 9.
- "Sounds pretty good," retired com farmer Arthur Kupke said upon hearing that his 24-year-old hostage son, Rick, was about to leave Iran. Page 9.
- A signal from the White House that the American hostages have been freed apparently is all that is needed to send more than \$5 billion in frozen assets flowing back to Iran, banking sources said. Page 9.
- Freedom after their unprecedented captivity may bring psychological and emotional difficulties to the hostages—and the American public. Page 8.

Time running out, U.S. warns Iran

By John Maclean and James Coates

U.S. Press Pool Service

WASHINGTON—The top echelon of the Carter administration, warning Iran that "time is running out," worked Monday night to salvage the hostage agreement that only hours before looked like a sure thing.

"We are plowing our way through it and I think it's manageable," Secretary of State Edmund Muskie said of the latest snag in the lengthy negotiations, which have been plagued by last-minute collapses.

At the White House, Press Secretary Jody Powell said the incoming Reagan administration would be bound by the hostage agreement only if it is completed and the hostages are released before Ronald Reagan becomes President at 11 a.m. Chicago time Tuesday.

"WE HAVE MADE it very clear that there was no obligation to adopt the previous negotiating position," Powell said.

Other White House officials denied that anything "unfounded" had taken

place, as Iran has charged. They said the dispute hinged on Iranian demands that any frozen assets turned up in the future be returned, with interest, to Tehran.

The problem erupted up in a lengthy appendix to the agreement signed earlier Monday by United States and Iranian officials. Muskie said the U.S. had been aware there was a problem for some hours. He refused to be pinned down as to whether President Carter knew about it when he announced an agreement early Monday morning.

"I HAVE to be honest. I don't think I can answer that question," Muskie said when questioned on the matter by reporters after he made his farewell speech to State Department employees in the department's diplomatic lobby.

The delay caused Carter to cancel plans to fly to West Germany as President and personally celebrate the release of the American hostages. But Carter accepted Ronald Reagan's offer to become the nation's special emissary to welcome the hostages in Germany.

Continued on page 19, col. 2

Accord bars any suits by captives

By John Maclean

U.S. Press Pool Service

WASHINGTON—The United States has agreed to return Iranian assets, pledge noninterference in Iran, and block any claims against Iran for the taking of the 52 American hostages in return for their freedom.

The agreement with Iran pledged the United States to "bar and preclude" any pending or future claims against Iran for any injury or damage as a result of the hostage seizure. The agreement thus blocks the hostages, their families, or anyone else from suing Iran for damages.

It also states that the U.S. will not make any claim for damages to U.S. property, including the U.S. Embassy compound in Tehran.

THE PROVISION, titled "waiver of suits and claims," seems sure to provoke a controversy. The other as-

pects of the lengthy agreement, issued in two parts, are declarations of the government of Algeria, were mostly known.

The nullification clause applies to lawsuits beyond the financial claims already registered against Iran from Iranian assets for companies and banks in Iran from real money. The clause states that once the hostages are returned, "the United States will promptly withdraw all claims now pending against Iran before the International Court of Justice."

Further, the agreement lists the areas of "bar and preclude" prosecution against Iran for any claim arising out of the actions of the 52 Americans, their subsequent detention, injury to them, or damage to U.S. property, including the embassy in Tehran, and "injury to the

Continued on page 19, col. 2

Billion-dollar boondoggle

Part 3: The consultants

Billions of dollars are squandered each year through the federal government's failure to watch tax funds as carefully as the average taxpayer projects his own money. In this series, James Coates of our Washington bureau uses the government's own reports to document the staggering dimensions of bureaucratic waste. Story on page 12.



Elisabeth Kupke of Franciscville, Ind., mindful of the letdowns of the past, remained apprehensive after she received a call from the State Department telling her of the agreement being worked on to free the hostages among them her son, Frederick Lee Kupke. Kupke, 33, is a State Department communications specialist.

Hope, frustration: Another day of waiting

HERE IS A summary of Monday's developments in the American hostage crisis. Events are listed by Chicago time, corresponding times are 1½ hours later in Tehran, 6 hours later in Algeria, and 1 hour later in Washington.

● 2:18 a.m.: Algeria's state radio announced that Iran had signed the agreement to release the 52 American hostages.

● 3 a.m.: Warren Christopher, chief U.S. negotiator in the hostage crisis, signs the agreement in Algeria.

● 3:15 a.m.: President Carter announces to the nation that an agreement has been reached "which will result, I believe, in the freeing of our

American hostages."

● 6:17 a.m.: Ronald Nahavi, the chief Iranian hostage negotiator, is reported as saying the Americans will be freed when Algeria "officially informs us that our deposits and gold have been deposited in a third country's central bank."

● 8:29 a.m.: President-elect Ronald Reagan invites Carter to represent him as special U.S. envoy when the hostages are released.

● 8:29 a.m.: A potentially serious last-minute snag is noted by a U.S. official. The Central Bank of Iran has not yet authorized the Bank of Iraq to set up the escrow account into which the frozen Iranian assets will be

deposited. "It's a small, technical matter, but it could be a serious glitch," he warns.

● 9:38 a.m.: Reagan tells reporters that he would sign the hostage agreement "unless there's something that we haven't seen yet. But I don't think there's anything."

● 1 p.m.: Carter accepts Reagan's offer to be special envoy.

● 2:24 p.m.: It is announced in Washington that Carter has canceled plans for a pre-inauguration flight to greet the hostages because of delays in implementing the agreement. "I can tell you if it is deliberate," Press

Continued on page 19, col. 1

Algerian jets wait in Tehran

By James Yuengr

LAST-MINUTE financial hitches delayed the release of the 52 American hostages in Iran and threatened to cast a shadow over Ronald Reagan's presidential inauguration.

Despite optimistic earlier assurances that the complicated arrangements had been completed and signed, it became clear late in the day that some details remained in conflict.

Hope sank when a key Iranian official accused United States banks of an "unfounded maneuver" and "subterfuge" that needlessly delayed the hostages' release.

EARLY TUESDAY, Behzad Nahavi, Iran's chief hostage negotiator, told the state radio that Iran would set a new deadline for the U.S. to start transferring the frozen assets in a multi-billion dollar deal to free the hostages.

He said the deadline would be announced after he had discussed with Al-

Text of Iran's reason for delay

Page 8

gerian intermediaries what he earlier called an "unfounded maneuver" and delays by U.S. banks.

If the transfer is not begun, "we will take more severe action," Nahavi said. He did not elaborate.

The hostages entered their 44th day of captivity in Tehran while two Algerian jets waited in darkness at the Tehran airport to carry them to freedom.

IN TEHRAN, ALGERIAN and Washington negotiators worked feverishly throughout the night to resolve the last-minute snags in the few remaining hours of President Carter's administration.

It became obvious that Carter would not have time to fly to West Germany as President to greet the hostages, as he had hoped, but Reagan said Carter would be allowed to make the trip as a private citizen when they finally are released.

Other House spokesman Jody Powell reminded the frontiers that if the hostages aren't released before the inauguration at midday Tuesday, Reagan needn't abide by any terms decided earlier.

"We have made it very clear that there was no obligation to adopt the previous negotiating position," Powell said.

AFTER A DAY of falling and rising hopes that began with Carter's statement that a hostage-release deal was in place, two key complaints were raised by Nahavi.

● He said procedures hadn't been completed for transferring frozen Iranian assets to an Algeria-controlled escrow account in the Bank of England where Iran could get control of them.

● More seriously, he accused U.S. banks of an "unfounded maneuver," which he charged, cut off Iran's ability to press for return of assets—undiscovered assets.

In all, \$5 billion in Iranian assets.

Continued on page 19, col. 1

Weather

CHICAGO AND VICINITY: Tuesday Cloudy; high 39 F (13 C); northeasterly wind; 3 to 10 miles in 10 to 15 kilometers an hour. Tuesday night: Cloudy; low 25 F (-1 C). Wednesday: Partly sunny; high 38 F (13 C). Map and other reports on Page 18.

Similarly, the character of Iran was largely the same as early on in the hostage crisis, but with different individuals playing the roles of the Iranian state leadership. While Bazargan was no longer Prime Minister, President Bani-Sadr fulfilled the same role. He was seen as a moderate who faced great opposition from the more radical and religious majority¹⁸⁴. Hostage Negotiator Behzad Nabavi was new to the narrative, “[favoring] the revolutionary garb of combat jackers and open-collar shirts, [and] has been closely identified with his longtime friend and fellow religious traditionalist, Prime Minister Ali Rajai, in opposition to the relatively liberal supporters of President Bani-Sadr”¹⁸⁵. The hostage takers, President Bani-Sadr, Prime Minister Ali Rajai, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Iranian public also made up the character of Iran at the conclusion of the hostage crisis. As these were the 443rd and 444th days of coverage of the events in Tehran, the media’s rhetoric regarding Iran was well-established, often describing Iran as irritated and politically scheming. While in the first case study, the character of Iran was quite vague and illusive, at the conclusion, there were far less explanations of Iran’s difficult behavior. When attempting to explain the reason for the hitch in negotiations, *The New York Times* described the head of the central bank of Iran, Alireza Nobari as “irritated because he felt the bank had not been sufficiently involved [...] It was possible that Mr. Rajai, in an effort to resolve the political dispute might seek to oust Mr. Nobari”¹⁸⁶. These assertions, offered from unnamed sources, demonstrate a level of pettiness and disregard of Iran’s political institutions by the Iranians participating in the hostage negotiations. The stubborn, anti-American rhetoric of Iran had been normalized to some degree. The actions of the students who overtook the embassy and Khomeini

¹⁸⁴ William G. Blair, “Leader of Iran’s Negotiating Team,” *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Bernard Gwertzman, “U.S. and Iran Agree to Compromise on Funds after Dispute Delays Release of Hostages; Carter Starts Movement of Frozen Assets,” *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

had been so focused upon by the media that they had become indicative of the nation. While not accepted by the American people, they had grown accustomed to the media's portrayal of this "other" and no longer needed as much justification. The internal conflict which fractured the character of Iran into factions early on in the crisis was still present, with *The New York Times* claiming "political disputes within Iran" between the head of the central bank and Prime Minister Ali Rajai caused the delay¹⁸⁷. Blaming this delay on another Iranian internal issue, the American people were easily able to attribute this fault to the Iranians and their poor internal leadership. The Iranian character also embodied themes of both superiority and victimhood, as the Iranian state postured itself against negotiations to end the crisis. Nabavi's assertion that the delayed appendix given to Iran regarding negotiations amounted to an "underhanded maneuver for delaying the final solution of the problem" was quoted by all three sources¹⁸⁸. Both the *Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times*, as well as CBS, recognized the divisive language used by the hostage negotiator and its parallel with earlier anti-American rhetoric. This stance taken allowed for the character of Iran to be the victim of a powerful and potentially manipulative world power, while also posturing itself to appear morally superior. The *Chicago Tribune* denotes many officials believed "Nabavi may have raised the objection publicly to reinforce the notion that Iran was acting from a position of strength"¹⁸⁹. This posturing by the Iranians illustrated that this "other" had not changed since the beginning of the crisis and was still attempting to humiliate America.

The setting themes for the conclusion of the Iran Hostage Crisis were quite different than those of November 1979. Both the United States and Iran were accustomed to the antagonistic

¹⁸⁷ Gwertzman, "U.S. and Iran Agree to Compromise," *New York Times*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ James Yuenger, "Algerian jets," *Chicago Tribune*.

relationship they shared by 1981 and had accepted that they would never see the world in the same way. Their varied perspectives, as a dictatorial Islamic state, the first of its kind, and as western world power, permanently prevented them from making significant changes in their relationship. The acceptance of this reality allowed for the themes of anticipation for change and a mixture of hope and fear to break loose. In the United States, the media captured the first moments of hostages' families hearing of their imminent release. CBS narrated the cries of celebration and quiet positivity of loved ones as they waited for the conclusion of the crisis¹⁹⁰. Both *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* interviewed hostages' families and friends, capturing the anticipation for their final arrival and safety. The city of Homer, Illinois was described by Tribune journalist Eileen Ogintz as impatiently waiting news on hostage and Homer native Paul Lewis's departure from Tehran. Preparing by tying yellow ribbons around the trees lining Main Street, flying American flags from each shop, and hanging a banner which would celebrate his release, the town hoped the latest disagreement in the conflict would be short-lived. Even so, they continued to toll the church bell each day in honor of Mr. Lewis, just as they had since the crisis began¹⁹¹. This small Illinois village embodied American sentiment regarding the crisis, anticipatory hope and fear, while promising to never forget the last 444 days. The setting of Iran also had themes of change and conclusions in its description by American news media, however, there was far more speculation in those reports. The poor relationship between the United States and Iran disallowed reporters from getting a better understanding of Iranian preparations for the return of the hostages. Algerian airplanes were seen on the runway of a Tehran airport and there was speculation that the hostages were waiting in the airport as

¹⁹⁰ Walter Cronkite, *CBS News*, January 20, 1981.

¹⁹¹ Eileen Ogintz, "Homer, Ill., vigil: 'None of us slept much last night,' " *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 1981.

well, but those reports were later denied by Iranian leadership¹⁹². This vague anticipation in Tehran did not leave Iranians with the same hope or fear, but instead brought these themes to the American setting.

Finally, the action theme of the last day of the hostage crisis was that of familiarity. The promises of the hostages' return turned sour and threats by Iran were all too familiar for the American news consumer. Throughout the crisis, with each perceived victory came roadblocks. Why should the conclusion to this international disaster be any different? A White House official emphasized the almost humorous nature of this latest delay in negotiations, saying, "Nothing has been simple in this operation from the beginning 14 months ago... so why should this have gone smoothly¹⁹³?" While this quote does little to assure Americans that the crisis is coming to an end, the latest actions are shown to fit into the narrative which has been written in the past year. Carter's botched attempt to bring the hostages home as president and be there to greet them in West Germany fits alongside his previous struggles to deal with the Iranians and his fruitless attempts to come out from under their thumb. Lesley Stahl of CBS News said, "Jimmy Carter's last full day as President of the United States found him once again at the mercy of the Iranians, who for reasons not fully understood here, have still not signed a final implementing document that would start funds flowing into an escrow account, which would in turn trigger the release of the hostages"¹⁹⁴. Describing the Iranians as illogical and vindictive echoed the previously established character of Iran. The actions which fit neatly into the pattern of the crisis fed into the quiet anticipation of the American audience, leaving them not so much hoping for good news as hoping for an end to this humiliation and the return of the hostages. This "long and harrowing

¹⁹² Walter Cronkite, *CBS News*, January 19, 1981.

¹⁹³ Terence Smith, "Carter Is Thwarted" *New York Times*.

¹⁹⁴ Lesley Stahl, *CBS News*, January 19, 1981.

ordeal,” as it was referred to by Walter Cronkite, had deeply impacted the way Americans perceived themselves and their country¹⁹⁵. Carter had proven unable to adequately care for the country, now it was Reagan’s turn to attempt to remedy the reputation of the United States.

Conclusion:

Iran’s antagonistic behavior, seizing the American Embassy for 444 days, set the tone for the duration of the Iran Hostage Crisis and guided much of the narrative established by American news media. Amplifying the differences between American and Iranian cultures and political structures, *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and CBS News established alternative characters of the nations of the United States and Iran. The international narrative in which these characters acted was consumed by the American public which were invested in the events unfolding in Tehran. While the news media formulated a basic narrative of good and bad guys, victims and aggressors, the reality was far more complex. Relations between the United States and Iran had been entangled for decades without much coverage by the American media. While historical analysis of the crisis tends to emphasize the role of the Iranian revolution and anti-Americanism, the crisis is a reflection of the US-Iranian relations and cannot be considered without looking at the broad history between these two states. Iran had suffered decades under the despotic and inhuman rule of Reza Shah, a ruler who the United States had put in place in the 1953 coup and subsequently bolstered Iranian distaste for American interference. This continued to ferment quietly under the Shah’s suppression until revolution struck and radical action was deemed acceptable as the Shah’s power weakened. This distaste was finally acted upon by the Students Following the Imam’s Line when they seized the embassy, gaining the support of the

¹⁹⁵ Walter Cronkite, *CBS News*, January 20, 1981.

Iranian revolutionary leadership and public. The perspectives of Iranian and American citizens were vastly different in the period leading up to November 4, 1979 causing different interpretations of the crisis. The decade of the 1970s had been strenuous for both and each were focused on domestic affairs, seeing the other as an antagonist to their desires. The American media aided in this pursuit, focusing their citizen consumers upon American morality and Iranian radical and illogical “otherness.”

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